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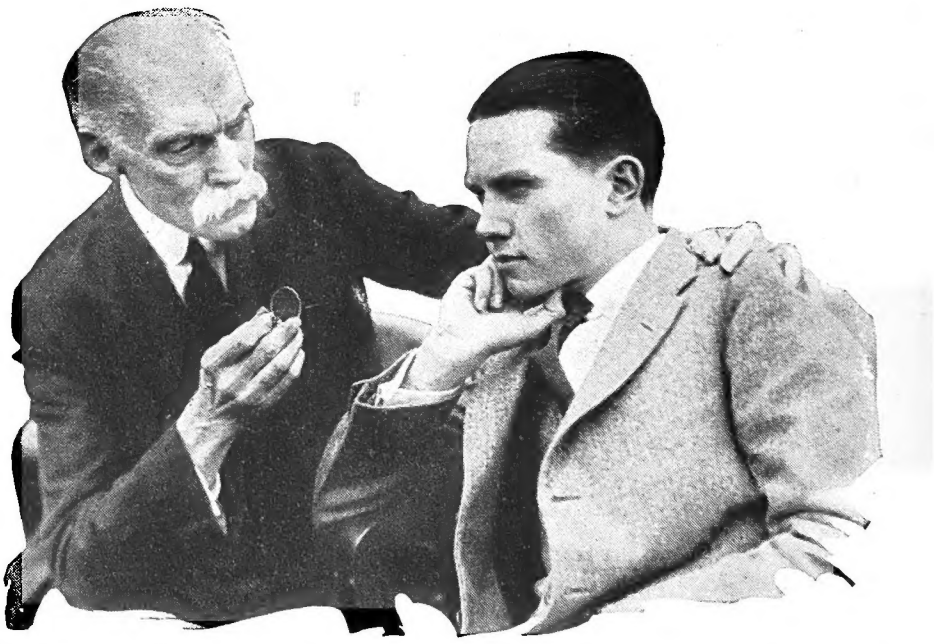

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"It has been the same way ever since. Man after man has been advanced over my head while I have just plodded along. And the pity of it is that a single word would have changed my whole life!

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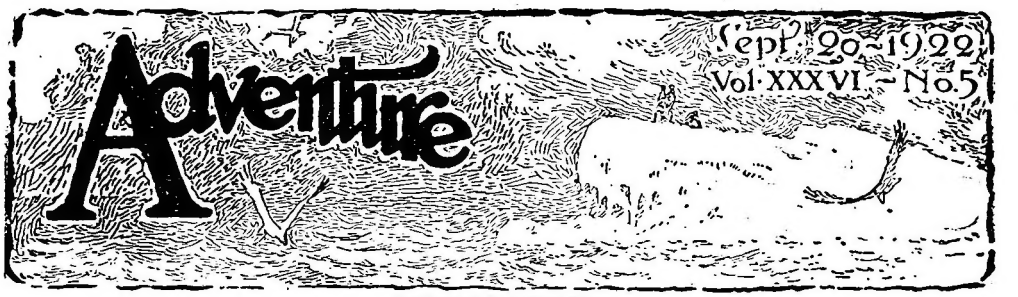


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WHEN the plane of a hot-headed Army aviator plows through a gathering of unfriendly mountaineers, the long-brewing enmity breaks into an open feud. "THE EDUCATION OF SNAPPER MACNEIL," a complete novelette by Thomson Burtis, in the next issue.

IT WAS lucky for me I got mixed in the tavern brawl on the beach at Cape Town, for that was how I met Captain Dabney and heard the story of *Mum Tumbo* and the Portuguese half-caste, which was to start us on the long search for the strange land north of the Zambezi. "GOLD OF THE YELLOW GODS," by Magruder Maury, is a novelette complete in the next issue.

*Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.*

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**Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



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Adventure
Sept. 20 1922
Vol. XXXVI No. 5

# FREEDOM'S LAST STAND

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By Norman Springer

*Author of "A Tropic Idyll," "The Ghost of Dago Fiddler," etc.*

WE SAT upon the string-piece of pier 15, and watched the bay traffic. "Smitty"—or Bob Smith, if you prefer—was in a gloomy mood; he openly suspected the worth-whileness of things.

I was surprized, for ordinarily Smitty is a merry fellow.

"But sometimes I get to thinkin' that Joe Bush was right," he said. "Everything is for the best, and nothin' ain't worth while, because it's all predigested anyhow. Ain't it so?"

And he bit off a chew of tobacco and ruminated.

"Sounds rather involved," I suggested. "But—this Joseph Bush?"

"Partner o' mine one time," said Smitty. "Him and Clancy. The time the three o' us was millionaires together, down in the Southern Ocean."

Of course, I rose to the bait.

"To what particular episode in your picturesque past are you referring in your discourse?"

"You talk like a book," said Smitty. "I'm referrin' to the time me and Clancy and Joe Bush was Croesuses. Yes, sir, we had millions to burn, as the sayin' is.

"And burn it we sure did. At least, Joe Bush did.

"Clancy could never forgive him for it, but seein' as how he saved our lives I could never hold it against him. What's the good o' bein' millionaires on a —— —— iceberg?

"Still, it was too bad, too bad."

"Indeed, yes," I agreed. "Too bad I can't make out what you are talking about. Suppose you begin again, and go slow, and spin the yarn."

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"If it's the yarn you want, why, I don't mind," said Smitty. "But, look here, you got to get it straight. I don't want you putting down that *I* shipped because I had to get out o' town. That ain't right, no matter what some of these he-gossips around this waterfront say. I wasn't in any serious trouble that time. It was just that I busted Tim Crellin's nose in an argument, and him bein' a policeman, of course I was pinched. But I got out on fifty dollars bail, and the fine wouldn't have been much more. No, sir, I shipped offshore that time because I felt like sailin' offshore. No other reason.

IT WASN'T so long after the Armistice, and I was only a few months out of the Service. And like many another feller, I found myself at loose ends with the world, so to speak. Couldn't get my bearings like; couldn't settle down. There was all kinds of good jobs goin' begging, here in the bay, and on the coast, but I just couldn't seem to stick in any of them.

Nerves, that's what it was. And when Tim Crellin calls me a shame-and-disgrace, why, I just up and popped him. And that's that.

Well, here was this ship layin' out in the stream, all ready for sea. And I says to myself, "Now, Smitty, m'son, six months or so in that hooker will do you good, and settle you down, and brush you up, too." She was a windjammer, and I hadn't been in sail for seven or eight years, and a voyage wouldn't do me no harm just then.

So I shipped in the *Marne*. That was her name. She was a long, snaky iron tank, German built, and full rigged. They took her away from the Germans and renamed her, and now she was goin' to Port Natal, in South Africa, with a mixed cargo o' canned salmon, and beans, and lumber. A holy mess below hatches, and worse above.

But I shipped, and of my own free will, too. Tim Crellin's nose didn't have nothin' to do with it.

But with Clancy, it was different. Poor old Clancy. He had to show a main sheet, and that's a fact. They was after *him*.

Now Clancy, he'd tended bar over in Pop Cahill's "What Cheer Housé" since the year one; and when the trouble came on the country, why, bein' a man very set in his ways, he just went on tendin' bar. Well, everything was lovely for a long time, and Pop was makin' so much money he raised Clancy's wages twice; and then the politicians got to scrappin' among themselves, and what do they do but start one o' these here probes. So Clancy shipped in the *Marne*.

Well, we went to sea, and had rosy times. Yes, we had—not. She was a brute, that ship. Mis-built, mis-stowed, mis-manned mis-everything.

I'll say I was settled down and brushed up. Why, I was worked to a shadder, pretty near. Didn't we catch the dirt, though! And that floatin' coffin would miss stays every blessed chance she got.

There was only a half a dozen or so for'ard what knew the work; the rest were Shippin' Board lads, willin' enough, but young and raw. And the afterguard—oh, my eye, the afterguard! The skipper was Captain Bates, and he was eighty-five if he was a day. He was a great clipper ship man in his day, but that day was forty years ago. Now he was just dodderin', and he'd go off to sleep while he was standin' up talking to you.

The mate was a good sailorman, and he had to sail the ship. Poor feller, how he did fret! And the second mate—oh, my, my! Mister Clarence J. Kirby, that was the second mate. He was the awfulest squirt that ever bunked aft in a ship. Yes, sir. He'd sailed around the bay in these hay scows, and maybe made a few trips up the coast in the steam schooners; and then the war came along, and Clarence J. goes to the navigation school in the Ferry Building for a week, or six weeks, or whatever it was, and they gave him a ticket. That's how he come to be second mate of a 2,000 ton ship. He couldn't brace her up without first looking up the job in a book.

Well, there we were, makin' the best of our way south, and with nothin' to do but work and listen to Clancy and Joe Bush argue it out. Joe Bush was cook, and he wasn't no slouch of a cook either. But he had his drawbacks as a shipmate, Joe Bush had.

He had gone and got religion—bad. When he was ashore, he spent his time holdin' street meetings; and when he went to sea he didn't change his ways none. The world was comin' to an end tomorrow mornin', or the next day at the latest, and

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we should all get ready for judgment. That was Joe Bush. No, that wasn't his real name. I don't know what his real name was, maybe he didn't have one. But when he began to try and convert a feller every time he went to the galley door for dinner, and got taken with the tongues on the forehatch in the second dogwatch, why, of course we called him Holy Joe. And then because he was always sayin' how the Lord spaketh from a burnin' bush, why, we just naturally shortened it down to Joe Bush. He was a specimen, Joe Bush was.

You can guess how Clancy and Joe Bush hit it off. They was like a couple three year married; they could see each other's faults.

Clancy was a wronged and persecuted man. He knew it, and so did anybody else who would listen to him.

Here he was, as good an American as ever came out o' County Cork, and as handy a lad with a bungstarter as the retail liquor business ever developed. And after years o' faithful service, just see what a fix he was in!

" 'Tis thim foreigners what have ruinated the country," says Clancy. "Thim foreigners and the women. They oughtn't to have let the women vote. Just look what they done; just look at the laws they made! I stood ut as long as I could," says Clancy, "I stood up for freedom at whativer cost, and here I be. That's the gratitude o' Democrats! I'm through wid 'em. I'm goin' back to Ireland, where a man is free to pot an Orangeman or hoist liquor whenever he feels loike ut."

Joe Bush, he'd shipped in the *Marne* just to make a missionary tour among the heathen, as near as I could figure it out. And right from the first day o' the voyage he marked down Clancy as bein' in special need o' salvation. I guess Joe Bush thought Clancy was the toughest bird o' the lot, what with his believin' in rum and in the Pope both, and every chance he got he'd explain to Clancy how near the end o' the world it was, and how little time he had in which to get washed clean.

"The Lord spaketh from a burnin' bush," says Joe, "and you'd better heed what I say."

It was pie for Clancy. He liked Joe Bush to come at him like that. It give him a chance to unload himself. He'd tell Joe Bush that if it wasn't for the likes o' him the country wouldn't have gone to the dogs, "and ain't you glad, Joe Bush, to see a dacent, hard-workin' man hounded out o' his job and away to sea by the minnows o' this cruel law the loikes o' you has passed?" Then Clancy would limber up and call Joe Bush a hairy tick, referrin' to his religion, and other names that he remembered from havin' been a bartender for fifteen years. And Joe Bush 'd get excited, and come right back with hell and fire and burnin' up forever and ever. "The Lord spaketh," says Joe Bush, and maybe he'd "have the tongues" right there on the deck.

Havin' the tongues means throwin' a fit. "Glory, glory," says Joe Bush, and he'd shiver and he'd shake, and maybe he'd bounce up and down, or maybe he'd stand on his ear on the forehatch, and all the time he'd be yellin' in a lingo that sounded like Chinese but wasn't. It was the tongues. Clancy didn't like it. He'd cross himself, and say it was the devil, and not the Spirit, that was makin' Joe Bush act like that. Then Joe Bush would get mad, and go in the galley and shut the door.

WELL, in course o' time—fifty-nine days out o' San Francisco, I think it was—the *Marne* got herself down to the latitude o' Cape Horn, and the Old Man began to run his easting down. It began to look like the old wagon would make time after all. Captain Bates, he knew them waters like the back o' his hand—which a lot o' skippers don't these days—and he drove her well south, to get the force o' the westerlies. Fine weather we had, brisk gales behind us, but not too brisk, and it bein' Summer down there it was daylight most o' the twenty-four hours. It looked like we'd go bouncin' across to the Cape in jig time.

So we would, if it hadn't been for Mister Clarence J. Kirby. It was him that piled her up. Well, poor lad, he's been under water for two years and more, and so I mustn't speak ill o' the dead—but he was the worst duffer what ever took charge o' a watch. The trouble with him was he didn't know anything, and he thought he knew everything. You've met fellers like that. Wouldn't listen to no advice.

Of course, there's always danger from ice down there in Summer. It drifts up from the Pole. Tremendous big bergs, miles big

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some o' them. We hadn't seen any so far, though, as I said, we was well south, but us old hands knew it must be around, and in my watch the mate kept a sharp lookout, you bet. There ain't much danger if you keep your eyes skinned; if it's clear, you can always see the blink in the sky, and if it's thick, why you can feel a berg. It was up to us to watch sharp, for there we were reelin' off ten and twelve knots, with a gale behind us and everything plastered on her from t'gans'ls down.

But the second mate, he didn't believe in it. No, sir, Mister Clarence J. Kirby hadn't seen no ice, and he knew it was just another one o' the mate's yarns to try and frighten him. And the mate swore hard and walked away for'ard. Him and Clarence J. wasn't good friends.

Well, the mate had to lose his sleep o' nights. That was the only way out o' it, because the Old Man couldn't stand a watch, not bein' able to keep awake that long. The mate got in the habit o' poppin' up on deck every hour or so, all night long. Then he'd sleep sound in his day watch below.

You can imagine how it was—nice bright afternoon, sun shinin', wind pipin', sails drawin', and the old girl just humpin' herself along. Nothin' in sight but ocean. Mate turns in with easy mind. Skipper dozin' by the cabin stove, thinkin' o' the days that used to be. Mister Clarence J. Kirby walkin' up and down the poop, with the "Young Officer's Sheet Anchor" under his arm, because he might get a job he don't know the name of. Clancy standin' lookout on the foc'sle head, poor old Clancy who never seen any ice except the little pieces he used to put in glasses.

All at once it gets thick. A blanket of fog drops down on the ocean, out o' a clear sky, so to speak. Up on the foc'sle head Clancy feels kind o' extra chilly, but he lays it to the fog and don't think much about it. He's tryin' to see through the fog, and can't. Aft on the poop Mister Clarence J. Kirby opens up his "Young Officer's Sheet Anchor" to the place marked *f*, and finds f-o-g. Oh, yes, here it is—"Fog, condensed watery vapor suspended in the atmosphere, at or near the surface o' the sea."

To be sure, he can see it suspended all around him. The book don't lie. Well, he's seen lots o' fog in his time, and it always went away after while, so why worry. He don't. He don't do a —— thing, and all the time the wind keeps pipin', and the ship tears along, and Clancy gets chillier and chillier and wishes he was back in the bar o' the "What Cheer House."

Well, that's just about how it happened. Though, of course, I can't tell it exactly because I was in my bunk asleep, same as the mate was. When I woke up I was layin' flat on the deck o' the foc'sle, pitched clean out o' my bunk, and a feller's foot was in my mouth, and I was hearing a most awful crashin', rendin', roarin' noise. Then something—I don't know what—hit me on the head, and the noise stopped.

I guess I was knocked out for a few minutes, because when I woke up again the foc'sle was empty. I could hear them yellin' on deck, and heavy things fallin', and water rushin'; and my head buzzed, but I got up and out o' the door.

Well, sir, the first thing I seen—and so close I could have leaned over the rail and touched it—was ice, blue ice. It stood up sheer, like the wall of a house, and in the fog it looked like a regular cliff, and so it was.

Oh, my eye, it was a holy mess. Chunks o' ice as big as the main hatch was fallin' on to our decks. The foretopmast, and what was tied to it, had fallen one way, and all the hamper on the main and mizzen had fallen the other way. Everything above the tops was gone. A holy mess, that's what. I could hear the ocean fillin' her up; I guess her bows was punched in like the plates was so much cardboard. Just think o' that whale of a ship rammin' into it, with all that canvas spread, and that wind blowin'. She'd run half her length upon the ice, and stranded herself; there she hung, teeterin'. My eye, what a mess!

I heard Joe Bush away off somewhere havin' the tongues. Aft by the boat davits the hands were screechin' and howlin', and though I couldn't see plain because o' the fog, I knew from the noise they were tryin' to swing out the boats. Sounded like panic, a regular hurrah's nest without head or tail to it.

But I was goin' aft, and I'd have been caught too, only just then I heard Clancy's voice callin' from the foc'sle head. He was singin' out for help, and I says to myself, "Now I can't leave the poor feller in trouble," and I scooted up the ladder to see what the matter was.

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The foc'sle head was so heaped up with chunks o' ice that a body could hardly move around. Somewhere Joe Bush was singin' out, "Glory, glory!" and I seen that the jib-boom was stickin' right into the wall o' ice, it looked like. I hunted for Clancy, bein' guided by his squealin', and there I found him with his head jammed under the fluke o' the port anchor. Well, there wasn't nothin' the matter with him except he was scared out o' his wits. He could have hauled himself clear, but instead he lay hollerin', and tryin' to lift the anchor off his head.

I grabbed hold of his ankles and give a heave, and he came free so quick I sat down on some icicles and cut myself. I swore and he swore, and I was worse hurt than he was, because except for the loss o' his sou-wester and some skin he was all right. Him bein' Irish it hadn't hurt his head to be under the anchor. Well, it wasn't no time to sit talkin', and we both got up in a hurry and started for the ladder. We didn't want to be left behind by the boats.

But we didn't get off the foc'sle head. Not in that direction. ——, it makes my hair stand up just to think of it even now.

There they was, aft there, gettin' the port boat over, because that was the boat they could launch free o' the berg. As I said, we couldn't see much because o' the fog, and the wreckage on the decks, but we could hear. I guess all hands was aft there, on that space of deck for'ard o' the poop—unless some o' them was already flattened out by the ice that had fallen.

Well, Clancy and me had took no more than a step aft when the berg caved right on top o' them poor fellers aft. That big cliff o' ice, which went up in the air out o' sight, just bulged out and fell on the ship. It was just like some big feller, one o' these giants in a kid's yarn, had give a shove and knocked over a mountain. It must have been half as long as the ship, maybe longer, and higher than it was long, the section that fell—and it went—smash!—right on the ship. I can't begin to tell you what it looked and sounded like—but it was something like Joe Bush's talk about the end o' the world.

And it was the end o' the world for them poor fellers aft. There was me and Clancy just frozen stiff, watching it happen, watching them thousands, or millions—oh, I don't know how many tons it was—lean over and over, and there was a cracklin' and explodin' like a lot of big firecrackers goin' off, and the men aft started a most awful screamin'—and then everything was swallowed up by the big noise.

That mountain hit the poop, and the stern went down and the bows went up, and me and Clancy went sailin' through the air like we was shot out o' a gun. It must have broke the ship clean in two, I guess. But I don't know. We couldn't see. We landed in a heap against the rail at the break o' the foc'sle head, and when we got untangled the ship was shakin' and liftin' from the wash of the waves started by the fall o' the ice. And I knew she'd slide in a minute, and then it would be all over with us, too. So I grabbed Clancy, and says, "This way, m'son; this way out," and we scrambled for'ard and jumped for the jib-boom, which was sticking almost straight up.

We went out the jib-boom like a couple o' cats. I stepped off the foot rope, right on to the ice. It was a sort o' ledge, and level as a deck. Clancy wouldn't have made it, him not being quite so spry, but I reached out and caught the tails o' his oilskins just in time, and yanked him up beside me. Then the jib-boom and the bows o' her, slid out o' sight into the fog. There was a big splash. Then—nothing. And Clancy and me sat down on the side o' that iceberg and listened to the waves swishin' and lapping down below us.

IT WAS God-forsaken lonely. It was like sittin' down somewhere outside the world and waitin' for something to happen. We began to hear other noises besides the lappin' of the waves—the cries o' sea birds, goonies squawking, and penguins. I knew them sounds, but Clancy, he says it's the souls o' the poor lads just gone below, and he started to pray for them as well as he knew how, which wasn't very well.

Pretty soon we heard some other sounds, the queerest kind o' queer sounds, and they was right close to us. They was live noises, if you get what I mean, quavering moans and gasps. Clancy prayed harder. I felt sort o' empty too, because I knew it wasn't no sea bird makin' that noise. The fog by now was so thick we couldn't see a fathom distant, but we could hear the thing move.

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Clancy stopped prayin' for a minute and whispered to me—

"Smitty, is ut a tiger, d'you think?"

Well, that give me start, that did; him, thinkin' o' tigers on an iceberg. But I thought maybe it was a starvin' polar bear, and when I says so Clancy began to cry. Then the thing that was makin' the noise began to chatter and whoop. It sounded like Chinese, only it wasn't. It was Joe Bush havin' the tongues.

I laughed right out, I couldn't help it. Clancy, he stopped cryin' and prayin', and he swore a blue streak. We was both like a couple o' women with the high-stair-ricks. And I sang out—

"Ahoy, Joe Bush, where are you?"

"Oh, glory, glory, glory!" says Joe Bush, roarin' like a bo'sun calling the watch. "The Lord spaketh from a burnin' bush! Oh, glory, glory!"

"It ain't the Lord, it's Smitty and Clancy," I says, "and I'm speaking from a cake o' ice. Stop havin' the tongues," I says, "because it makes Clancy swear."

Well, I guess that was a come-down and a disappointment for Joe Bush, to find out it was only a couple o' shipmates, and not the burnin' bush, what had hailed him. But he didn't let on. He just changed his tune.

Just as soon as I mentioned Clancy, he was off. That was like Joe Bush; any time was a good time to him, any place was a good place. Says he to himself, "Now this is my chance to save some bran' from the burning," and he didn't lose no time about starting. But I ask you, what sort o' place was that for to go preachin' hell-fire in, and to two poor shipwrecked fellers who was freezing on an iceberg in a fog? Joe Bush never did have any sense about the fitness o' things.

"Repent ye son o' evil, ye sot o' rum, ye slave o' Rome!" sings out Joe Bush. "The Lord spaketh, oh, glory, glory, and the world shaketh, and the end o' all things is come! Repent ye, or burn in the pit o' fire!"

"Shut up, you cruel baste, or trot out your fire," says Clancy, breakin' off a chunk of ice and heavin' at the place in the fog where Joe Bush was preachin'.

"That's right, put up or shut up, Joe Bush!" says I, likewise heavin' a chunk at the sermon. "We're pretty cold, Joe Bush, and wishin' hard to burn awhile."

And we was cold, too. It was a most awful cold, and it was eatin' right into us. You never sat on an iceberg in a fog, but you just try sittin' on a cake o' ice some day, and, believe me, pretty soon you'll begin to feel it. Well, we was in cold storage, and the wind shifted, and come at us over the ice, and it was like stickin' knives into us. It was too much even for Joe Bush, that wind was. It shut him up, when we couldn't. We sat there and suffered, and it was awful dismal. Pretty soon my teeth, and Clancy's teeth and Joe Bush's teeth all began to click and rattle like the castanets in the Spanish fandango, and I wondered if it wouldn't be best to slide over the edge into the sea that we could hear swishin' and lappin' down there, and have it over with quick.

But that shift o' wind did us a good turn, or maybe it was that the fog, havin' done us all the harm it could, was ready to go off and hunt up some other poor ship somewhere. Anyway, it thinned out and lifted —just like that. One minute we couldn't see the length o' a man, the next minute we could make out the water and the ice for hundreds o' yards, and then, right away it seemed like, there wasn't no fog, and the sun was shinin, and the sea was sparklin', and the ice was steamin', and it was bright afternoon once more.

It sounds nicer than it really was. Why, it was almost worse than the fog, that sunshine was, because it couldn't warm us against all that ice, and we could see just what a bad fix we was in. ——, it looked lonely! Just ice and sea and sky. This berg we was on looked like a coast line. It was miles big. And this coast line went straight up and out o' the water for a hundred feet and more. We was sittin' on a ledge, about thirty feet above the water, at the head of a little bay; the only break, it looked like, in the whole face o' the cliff. There was a little berg sailin' away from us, out o' the bay. I says to Clancy, "I bet she's sittin' on the *Marne*." He was too cold and miserable to do more than cross himself.

I looked around for Joe Bush, and for a minute I couldn't locate him. All I could see was the foret'gallant yard stickin' endways in the ice, where this ledge took a slope up and ended, about forty feet from where we was sittin'. The canvas was still with the spar; the whole sail was there, it looked

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like, for I could see the patch me and the sailmaker had sewed in just above the starboard clew-iron, and there was a long piece o' the clew-line still attached. But Joe Bush wasn't in sight, and I didn't see where he could have got to because the cliff sloped pretty sharp behind us for a good fifty or sixty feet, and it looked as smooth as a sheet o' glass.

Well, there wasn't any use stayin' where we was, and it didn't seem much use tryin' to get anywhere else, but seein' the sail give me an idea. It might make us feel a little less cold, or keep us from getting much colder, though that last didn't seem no way possible. So I jabbed Clancy in the ribs to get some life into him, and we went sliding and crawling up the ledge on our hands and knees.

When we got to the sail, why, there was Joe Bush. He was rolled up in the canvas, and at first I swore at him for bein' selfish, but after I got a look at him I had to feel sorry for the lad. If we was cold, he was blue. Anyway, there was lots of sail for the three of us.

Joe Bush was colder than us, and he had less on to meet it. Now, I didn't have as many clothes on as I would have liked, havin' come right from my bunk to the iceberg. But I'd turned in standin', like a feller always does down in them latitudes, and barrin' boots and oilskins I was dressed for winter. Clancy had what I lacked, him havin' been on watch when it happened. But Joe Bush was in his cookin' rig, which wasn't very thick, bein' just light cotton. Workin' around a hot stove he wouldn't want any more clothes. Besides, he was a cook, and cooks is like stokers, very thin-blooded and only happy in the tropics. So no wonder he was blue.

Well, I borrowed Clancy's sheath knife—mine was hangin' in my bunk, in the poor old *Marne*, wherever she was now—and cut the sail free from the jack-stay; and then I rolled Joe Bush out of it, and threw the bight of it over the end o' the yard. We had a nice little cone-shaped tent, with plenty of slack to sit on and wrap around us. We left the leeward side open, to let the sun hit us, and since the wind was cut off, it wasn't so bad.

But it was bad enough, even if we did thaw out a bit. Sittin' there cuddled together, and warmin' up, why, we had a chance to think. And we didn't have anything nice to think about—leastways, Clancy and me didn't. And I ask you, what sort o' mates was them two to be cast away on an iceberg with?

Poor old Clancy, he was awful downhearted, because now he had to die, and without a priest or a funeral or a mass bein' said for his soul. And when I says I would have a mass for him when I got back home, why, he says that wasn't no consolation because I was goin' to freeze or starve same as he was. Cheerful, wasn't it? And so —— true!

Then Joe Bush, he pipes up. I'll say this for him, he wasn't downhearted. All this was pie for him. He knew where he was goin' when he turned his toes up. It was the hand o' God, the end o' the world, like he foretold. Now he could say, "I told you so, and you'd better hurry up and repent, for the Lord spaketh from a burnin' bush." He was worse than Clancy.

I seen somethin' had to be done, and anyway I figured I'd rather die workin' than sittin'. So I took the sheath knife, and started to cut foot holds in the slick side o' the cliff.

"What for?" says Clancy.

"We can't stop here," I says. We got to get over the mountain."

"What's the use?" he says. "The ice is as warm here as on the other side."

Well, that was true enough, and no mistake. It wasn't that I expected to find anything on the other side. It was just to keep busy, and stop thinkin'. So I lied like a good fellow.

"I'll tell you what's the use," I says. I pointed up the side o' the ice to where a sort of cone of ice stuck up above the ridge. "You see that?" I says. "Well, that is the masthead o' this berg, and that's where we're goin'. What for? Because we can see a long way all around from there, and most likely make out the ship that's on her way to pick us up. And if we don't sight her right away, why, maybe there's low land and flat on the other side, and we'll most likely catch a seal or a dead whale or somethin' to keep us alive until the ship does come." All bunk, every word o' it, but it done me good to talk that way.

"Ain't what I say the truth?" I asks Joe Bush, figurin' he'd be against Clancy on general principles.

"The Lord spaketh from a burnin'—" he began.

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"Yes, and the Lord helpeth them what helps themselves," says I. "So shake a leg, m'son, and lend a hand with these steps."

I guess that must have been good religion, because Joe Bush got right up and started to work.

"The way is up, and the Lord saveth if He willeth," says he, or words like it, and from then on we worked spell about cuttin' the steps. I didn't make Clancy bear a hand because he was a duffer aloft, anyway, and this was mighty slippery and ticklish work.

Well, in a couple o' hours, I guess, we had holds cut pretty near to the top. It was hard ice, and hard work. I come down and give Joe the knife, and then set about fixin' up a bowline for Clancy from the ropes I took off the clews and earrin's o' the t'gan's'l. I knew the only way we'd ever get him safe up that cliff was on a bowline, for he was one o' these fellers what always goes dizzy when they reach the futtock shrouds. There was plenty of rope, and to spare, and I took it all, figurin' we'd likely need it on the other side.

"I was all ready, with Clancy tied up, when we heard a hail and halloo from Joe Bush. There he was at the top o' the cliff, standin' by this cone or peak I spoke of. Bein' on the skyline he looked big as a house, and his voice was bigger. He lifted his arms in the air.

"Oh, glory, glory, glory!" he was yellin'.

Then he stepped off, and disappeared. Yes, sir, just like that. Just dropped out o' sight from the top o' the cliff.

"It looked like he took a jump. And we thought he had.

"My God! He stepped off," says Clancy, and I couldn't say he hadn't. "Better for us if we step off, too," he says. "Let's jump off this place, and have done with ut, Smitty, for 'tis no use whativer our stayin'." And he looked so wild and desperate I woke up sudden.

"Maybe he didn't jump," says I. "Maybe there's a path or a ledge or somethin' that he went down; maybe he fell. I'm sure he slipped, and there he is layin' hurt, maybe, waitin' for us to come and pick him up."

I started up the steps, draggin' Clancy after me, and givin' him no time to argue about it. He was in mortal fear o' that climb, that was one o' the things that was wrong with him. It was pretty bad. The steps wasn't nothin' but toe and hand grips, slippery as glass, and it was steep goin'. How we ever made it gets me. I had to go fast and keep a strain on the rope; then Clancy wouldn't be able to think and get dizzy. Besides, I didn't care much if we did fall. I thought Joe Bush had jumped, and Clancy wanted to, and it was just that I'd made up my mind to go out fightin' that made me go at it so hard and reckless.

When we got near the top, we heard Joe Bush, way down on the other side. He wasn't dead, and he couldn't be hurt, for no hurt man could beller like that. He was still gloryin', and, oh, my eye, but it was a fine sound that minute. And when I reached the ridge, and dragged Clancy up, and we looked down—why, we felt like gloryin' too.

WE LOOKED straight down for seventy-five, maybe one hundred feet. This side o' the cliff was overhung, and a straighter drop than the one we came up. But that didn't worry us none. Because down at the bottom was Joe Bush dancin' around on the deck o' a ship. Yes, sir, he was! And this peak o' ice that stuck up above the ridge right beside us wasn't what we thought at all. It was the masthead o' this ship; the main truck, no less, though it was so coated with ice you couldn't know it until you got right up against it.

Well, it was so different from what I'd looked for, I was struck all in a heap, as the sayin' is. For a minute I just lay there and stared, and made up my mind my eyes wasn't tellin' a lie. Or my ears, either. For there was Joe Bush throwin' a fit down below, and Clancy throwin' a fit beside me. Ravin' about bein' saved, saved, Clancy was, and from the way he carried on you'd have thought it was a steamship that was just waitin' for us to come aboard, when off she'd go, four bells and a jingle, for the "What Cheer House."

But I knew better than that, right from first sight. It was a long way from being our rescue. I was lookin' down on a ship, no mistake about that. What the ice had left of a ship. There she lay, with her starboard side and stern overhung by the cliff and on her other side was a field of ice that was low and hummocky and stretched away for a mile, it looked like, before it ended in the sea. Safe in port, she was. My eye, yes. The cruel waves wouldn't batter her

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no more; they'd only swaller her if they ever got near enough. She was so heaped up and around and covered with ice and snow a feller couldn't tell much about her from the top o' the cliff, but she was a wood bark, and she'd been pinched by pressure amidships, which had lifted the mainmast out o' the step, I guessed, and caused it to fall against the cliff the way it had.

That was lucky for us. It was a way down—and the only way down or up we ever found. This cliff run on for miles, it seemed, never less than one hundred feet high and sometimes risin' to two or three times that. Inland was just ridge after ridge, and there was no seein' across the berg. We never found out how big the berg was, but it was a good-sized island. I know what it was, a big chunk o' the Ice Barrier from around the Pole, that's what. Around the sea edge o' the cliff was little fields of low ice, like down there where the ship was.

It was afterward we found all this geography out. Just now what I worried about was gettin' Clancy down. I knew I could make it all right; Joe Bush wasn't any handier aloft than I was, you bet.

"Walk down the blurry mast," says you. "Ain't you a sailor, or what?" Oh, yes, it was the way down, but it wasn't so easy as all that. Not for poor old fat Clancy.

This mast was so coated up with ice it was hardly like the part o' a ship's top hamper, at all. The masthead was a bit above our heads, and a solid sheet o' ice connected it with the cliff; and about six feet below us, or maybe a little more, was a spar, a t'gallant yard, which was her highest, and it had snapped a lift and cockbilled itself, so that a feller could lower himself down from the cliff, and slide down the spar to the mast, and swing down to the crosstree—providin' he didn't loose his grip on the ice and fall. Ice, ice, everywhere ice, hard and slippery. And that mainmast was spar-hung different, and rigged different, from any mainmast I ever seen anywhere. But I'll tell you about that, and about the ship, in a minute.

Just then, what I did was to shove Clancy over the edge, and lower him down this yardarm to the mast, keepin' his lifeline taut; and then when I had him down in the crosstree, or what passed for a crosstree, why, I got down beside him, and snubbed the line, and lowered him into the top, which was as big as a room with a railin' around it, and a lubber hole in it that a whale could have gone through, almost. He could make his own way down from the top, for there was ratlines, or chunks o' ice that looked like them, between the shrouds in the lower rigging.

But I took a different way down. I went down Bristol fashion, I did, like a smart lad. I was goin' to beat Clancy down. I grabbed hold of a stay—she was stayed different from any mast I ever seen—and started to slide. Well, this stay was as big around as my leg, what with the ice around it—it was just a pillar o' ice, so to speak, with a hemp core—and as slippery as the greased pole at the stevedores' picnic. I went down, I'll say I did. I left patches o' pants and guernsey and skin from top to bottom of that stay.

Joe Bush had stopped bein' thankful out loud by now, and was jabbin' away at somethin' with his knife—tryin' to cut away ice from a door, I seen when I got to his side. Clancy, when he reached the deck, wasn't bein' saved, no more either.

That ship wasn't no cheerful sight when a feller got a close up look at her. Why, she'd been layin' where she was so long she really belonged there. D'ye get that? She was part and parcel o' that iceberg, and that's a fact.

"Where's all the crew?" says Clancy, and he whispered it. "Ain't there a man aboard her?"

"The last crew left this packet before ever you and me was born, or our dads either," I says.

And that's a fact. Now I was on her deck, I could make her out better. I'd seen her like—in pictures. There was the riggin', and the single tops'l, and the monster main yard, which had fallen, and was layin' half aboard and half on the ice, and was so froze in it, could be just seen and no more. And there was the beam o' her, a third as broad as she was long; and I could imagine the pot-bellied bows she had, but I couldn't see them, and never did, because for'ard o' the beam she was just one solid mass o' ice.

Aft she was more open to the eye, and she had a most amazin' high poop, and instead of it endin' at the quarter, why, it narrowed down to half the width o' the deck and jutted for'ard pretty near to the mainmast. There was an alleyway between the bulwarks and the side o' this house on

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each side, but the port one looked like it was froze up solid. To starboard the deck was pretty free o' ice. It was under the overhang o' the cliff, which had kept the snow off, and the list of the ship, which was to port, had kept it clear o' drift.

I seen that Joe Bush wasn't doin' any good pecking away with his knife. It would have taken a batterin' ram to break through the coat of ice over the port wall of the narrow cabin. So I had an idea, and took a squint down this starboard alley, and sure enough there was doors, three o' them. Two o' them let into this deck house, or round house, or whatever you like to call it. and the other, at the break o' the poop, was a door to the cabin proper. None o' them was much iced up.

WELL, two hundred pounds o' Erin pulled the for'ard door open handy enough, and there we was inside. It was pretty gloomy and dark inside, but we could see well enough to know where we were. We was in the ship's galley. Yes, sir, the galley it was, and a nice roomy one, too. There was copper pots and other cookin' gear hangin' on the after wall, and there was a big wood-box filled up with cut firewood, and the for'ard half o' the room was pretty near filled up with a big square brick stove. Brick, yes sir! With iron doors on the ovens, and in the middle was a wide sunken space spread with sand, and on the sand was the ashes of a fire what had burned out who knows how many years ago. There was a brick chimney, too.

Joe Bush looked at it, and he says, "Dutch." He was right, too. And I ask you, how long is it since the Dutch was buildin' ships that had the galley aft, and fitted up with brick stoves?

Well, we never thought about ages. Not then. What we thought about was thawin' out. Gettin' a fire made, that was our one idea, and we didn't even have to talk about it to each other. We got busy.

We all three had matches, and Joe Bush, after much agony o' spirit, and after I told him if he didn't I would, tore some pages out o' the Bible he carried always in his hip pocket, but gettin' the kindlin' and shavin's wasn't so easy. Everything in that galley was frozen, even if there wasn't any ice or snow in there. So was everything in the ship frozen, includin' us. The pots stuck to the bulkhead, the axe stuck to the wood-box, the pieces o' firewood stuck together and was so brittle they wouldn't split. But pretty soon we got a blaze goin' on the sand pan, and, oh, my eye, the mere sight o' it put new life into us.

We blew and we fanned and we fed, and I went up on top o' the house with the axe and cleared away the ice from the chimney, so it would draw. This was easy, because the chimney was bricked over on top, and had little holes in the side for draft. We had a roarin' fire then, and began to feel less like walkin' icicles. The bricks began to crack and sizzle when they warmed up, and every now and then one of the frozen sticks o' wood exploded and went flyin' the length o' the room. We had to watch out and dodge. Clancy and me was lucky, but one hit Joe Bush in the pants, and when he straightened up he said something about a burnin' bush.

Joe Bush was a cook, and he felt right at home in that galley. Everything was so different that Clancy and me didn't say much, but just sat where the heat would hit us; but Joe Bush went pokin' here and there, hummin' a hymn about Solomon. He found a big iron plate that went over the fire; it had holes in it, and was for settin' pots on to cook. Then he found a brass lamp with a spout and a floatin' wick. The wick snapped right off when he touched it. The oil was froze into a cake, of course, and he put the lamp on the stove to thaw out.

Clancy says—

"Oh, my, but I'm thirsty."

Joe Bush filled a pot with some last Winter's snow from the deck, and melted it. When it was good and hot we drank it, and it done us a world o' good. Sort of limbered us up inside.

Clancy says—

"Oh, my, but I'm hungry."

"The Lord feedeth the lily o' the field, and puts clothes on the sparrer o' the valley," says Joe Bush. "Let's look for the lazaret."

The oil in the lamp was melted—whale oil, by the smell o' it—and Joe Bush made a wick out o' a strand of the rope I fetched over the cliff. It burned fine when he lighted up. Then he led the way aft to the next door, and the three o' us went explorin'.

The room next abaft the galley in this narrow cabin, was big and roomy and fitted

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up with bunks and a long table that was set in the deck. It looked like the place where the tradesmen and bo'suns and the like might have lived. There was beddin' in the bunks, and gear scattered around, but no skeletons like we half-expected, so we didn't wait to look close at anything, but followed where Joe Bush led.

He took us through a door at the after end o' this room, and it was the first door we'd struck that wasn't froze shut. We found ourselves in another little room that had nothin' in it except a couple o' bunks, and what looked at first like a boxed-in table. But it turned out to be a sort o' booby hatch, and there was a ladder in it that led down between decks. The coldest, dankest breath o' air I ever felt came up that ladder.

We didn't go down. Not then. Joe Bush opened another door, and we walked into the main cabin.

It was a whopper of a room, and no mistake. It was paneled and beamed in dark wood, and the ladder that went up to the poop was like the grand staircase o' a palace ashore, what with the carved posts, and the width of it. The hatch at the head was part caved in, and half o' the stairs was frozen in solid; so was the after end o' this saloon, which was square across, because the ice had jammed up astern of her and come spillin' in through the big square ports that was like windows.

It was dark in there because o' the ice; no daylight at all, just a dullish green shine. So Joe Bush held the lamp over his head, to throw its light as far as possible. We didn't find any trap in the floor, like he expected; but we did find out something about this ship.

I noticed there was some writin' carved in the main crossbeam, overhead, and I asked Joe Bush to throw the light against it. Well, it was cut deep and plain, but it was in Latin and Dutch, and none o' us could read those lingoes. We made out two names, "Jan Groot" and "Rotterdam," and at the end o' the writin' was the date, "A. D. 1811."

There were doors on both sides, and them to starboard let into berths, and I guess them to port did too, only they was frozen in and full o' ice. Most o' the rooms we looked into just had bunks, and one, twice the size o' any other, had a built-in bed like the Dutch have in their houses ashore. Yes, sir, a bed with a roof and walls and slidin' doors, and how any feller ever slept in it and not smothered, beats me. We figured this room must have been the skipper's.

We found clothes and things, chests and feather ticks, which I'll tell you about in a minute. But we didn't find nothin' to eat, and scoffin's was what we was after. I, for one, didn't expect we'd find anything to eat, not after seein' that date. But Joe Bush wasn't cast down. Nothin' fazed him. He led us back to the booby hatch, and we went down into her hold.

Now, I been talkin' a lot about cold. And it was just as cold as I've said, on the iceberg, or on deck, or anywhere more than a few feet away from the galley fire. But when we went below decks, why, say, this cold I've been talkin' about was like a Summer day in Panama. It's a fact. Down below was a dark cold that was like—well, next time you're on a refrigerator boat in the tropics, you come up out of the engine-room, say, dressed in a sweat rag, and step into one o' the meat rooms and sit down. Then you can guess what the hold of the *Jan Groot* was like.

That ship was in cold storage. She was packed in ice like ice cream is packed in ice, and she had been packed in ice for—well figure it out—say one hundred years or thereabouts. Likely a few years more than less, if that date in the cabin meant anything. One hundred years on ice. No wonder I didn't expect to find anythin' eatable in that hooker.

WHEN we got down between decks, we found ourselves in the middle o' a scene of wreck and confusion, all froze up tight. This was the way of it—the ice besides pinchin' the hull had shoved up the bottom, and that had lifted and shifted cargo, o' course. It was dark as ink down there. We had only the little light from the lamp Joe Bush carried. But that little light caused the most amazin' reflections, just like we was in a cave o' jewels.

It was a mess, busted decks, busted bulkhead, stringers and beams and chunks o' wood layin' around, and cargo spilled everywhere. That cargo was barrels. All kinds and shapes o' barrels, from big hogsheads and puncheons down to little kegs. Some o' the barrels was busted open, and

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that's what made the amazin' lights. There was colored chunks o' ice inside the barrels, and this one glowed ruby red, and that one was sort o' brown, and the next was a clear yellow, and so on. Whenever the lamp threw a ray on one, it glowed and sparkled most beautiful to see.

"The fires o' hell are pleasin' to the eye," says Joe Bush, "and the path o' the righteous is narrow and horny."

And he went clamberin' aft, slippin' and scramblin' over the litter—because everything was covered with a thin film o' ice—and I went after him, because I had the axe, and he says he needed me to bear a hand. But Clancy, he stayed by the foot o' the ladder. He was talkin' fast about the holy saints, and diggin' into the nearest open barrel with his sheath knife.

Well, Joe Bush knew where he was goin'. I guess it was his cook's instinct. This 'tween decks was a whoppin' big compartment, goin' back to the stern o' her, and I guess in her day the ship had carried passengers as well as a whale of a crew. But Joe Bush didn't get lost. He brought up standin' right on top o' the ship's stores. Yes, sir, there was the lazaret, tiers o' casks o' beef and pork, and boxes and kegs and what not.

He gave me the lamp to hold and took the axe, and in a jiffy he had knocked open one o' the casks. Even then I thought he was workin' for nothing. I was so sure he'd only find dust, or somethin' like it, in the cask that I didn't even hope against hope. Just think o' it, one hundred years and more.

But when he'd knocked the staves back, what did he pry out but a cask o' beef. Froze into a solid chunk, it was, with the brine lookin' like frostin' on a cake, and the joints o' meat lookin' like plums in a duff. It wasn't dust, it was solid, somethin' a feller could sink his teeth into when it was thawed out.

It was amazin'. I let out a yell o' joy, and Joe Bush had the tongues for a minute, and swung wild with the axe and busted in the head o' a keg. Well, that keg had sea-bread in it, big square hardtack. They was kind o' black lookin', and froze all together in a mass, but they looked like somethin' to eat for all that. Then Joe Bush opened a box, and it was full of little stone jars, and what was in them we didn't know.

We'd have looked around some more, only it was so cold, and Clancy hadn't stayed to help us carry. When I sung out for him, I found he'd gone topside. So I hoisted the keg o' bread on my shoulder, and Joe Bush chopped out a chunk of beef and took some o' the little jars, and we hustled for the galley as fast as we could.

There was Clancy bendin' over a pot on the stove, and doin' a jig step at the same time. The most wonderful smell was comin' out o' that pot. Just faint, it was, but a wise nose couldn't miss it, or mistake it. I hadn't smelled that smell in so long I'd most forgotten the flavor, and I never expected to smell it again in this world.

"Is it?" I says to Clancy.

"Ut is," says he to me. "Smitty, me lad, ut's millionaires we be, you and me, and him," and he jerks his head towards Joe Bush. "Ut's a gold mine, no less, wid all the nuggets the soize o' barrels. Look ye here."

I took a squint into his pot. He was melting a piece o' this colored ice he'd brought up from the hold. It was a rich mahogany color, and the bouquet—oh, Mr. Volstead—that bouquet! And when it sunk into my mind—all those barrels down below, a hold full o' them, a ship full o' them—all filled up with pretty ice that was more than one hundred years old—and it belonged to us three, millions, gold mines—oh, my eye!

"Look here, Joe Bush!" I says, and shoved the pot under his nose, and began to tell him about it. Would you believe it, he got mad. He shook his fist at the pot, and would have punched it, only I pulled it away. He says it was a snare o' the devil, who was a wily bird o' prey.

"Oh, my dear brothers," says he, "ye are sots and sinners, and ye would rinse yourselves with the blood o' Satan. Hear ye, the Lord speaketh from a burnin' bush that the end o' things is nigh, so beware, beware!" And off he went into the tongues, and I seen he was goin' to throw a fit in a minute if we wasn't careful, and then where would dinner be? So I took Clancy and the drink outside, and pretty soon Joe Bush was singin' a hymn and thawin' out the grub.

It was rum in the pot. But it wasn't like any rum I'd ever swigged before. Oh, my eye! It went down slick and oily, and with never the hint o' a bite; and when

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it reached soundin's, it just spread soft-like all through a feller, warmin' him up, makin' him just glow. Clancy and me pretty near threw fits ourselves when we got to talkin' about what was under our feet. Treasure! Millions! That was it.

He showed me some other chunks o' colored ice he had in his pocket. He'd already tried them with his tongue, and one was brandy, and one was Dutch schnapps, and the ruby-colored one was port wine. But that rum was good enough for us just then. We'd never expected to taste anythin' half as good. We sipped it, and held it on the tongue, and swallowed it slow so as to get all the good of it, and between us we got away with about a pint, all that he had melted. It didn't make us drunk. Just warm and happy. We paddled up and down that icy deck until Joe Bush called us to eat, and we didn't feel the cold at all.

Joe Bush had made a cracker hash out o' the stuff we'd brought up. It was mighty good to men as hungry as us, even if it was older than we'd ever get to be. I've eaten worse hash many a time, especially in one hungry hooker I sailed in out o' Glasgow. The hardtack was a bit musty tastin', and the junk wasn't exactly juicy, but the hash was fillin'.

Joe Bush drank his snow water, but Clancy and me sampled the other chunks o' ice. They was delicious; just the sort o' drinks to have with cracker hash.

Then we began to think about callin' it a day and turnin' in. That is, me and Clancy did. We was warm, and comfortable, and awful drowsy. We stretched out in front o' the fire, and Joe Bush put us to sleep, him sittin' there sad and sorrowful, talkin' about sots and the burnin' bush.

WE WOKE up next mornin' without the ghost of an ache or bad taste, and feelin' fine. Joe Bush was disappointed; he figured on giving us advice when we felt bad. But that stuff never did make a feller feel bad; no sir, even if he got all lit up the night before, he'd wake up feelin' fresh as a daisy.

It was cracker hash and rum for breakfast, and then we all three put in a long hard day makin' things shipshape, and settlin' down for a long stay. Just how long a stay we didn't like to reckon. At least, me and Clancy didn't. Joe Bush didn't seem to care. He trusted in the Lord and never bothered his head about anything except the next meal and our bein' sots. But I couldn't help thinkin' about this ship bein' here so long before we came, and how in another one hundred years or so, some other poor shipwrecked fellers might find her again—and us too. Unless the berg broke up, and we went to Davy Jones. We could feel the sea workin' under the ice, sometimes, and the ice cliff kept calvin' right along, though never very near to us.

Well, we wasn't going to starve for want of food and drink, especially the last. And we wasn't going to freeze for lack o' fire, clothes or bed. That we knew. We found some more lamps with oil in them, and looted the after cabin o' whatever we needed.

We needed firewood, so we knocked out the after wall o' the galley, and then we had one nice big room, with table and bunks and stove handy, and all within the same four walls. And we chopped the ice away from the ports—square like windows, they was—and that gave us some daylight.

Joe Bush told us that Dutchmen slept between ticks, instead o' between blankets, and I guess he was right because we never saw the sign o' a blanket. So we got the big soft ticks out o' the after cabins and piled them in the bunks we had picked out. They were the only things we found in that ship that didn't have to be thawed out. The feathers hadn't froze.

We found some swell-lookin' duds in the skipper's cabin, and in the chests in some o' the other rooms. I'd never seen the like, except in a play. There was coats with big bellyin' skirts to them, and other coats that had the tails buttoned back swaller-tail fashion, and when a feller put one o' these on he looked like a picture o' the Father of Our Country; and there was gorgeous vests made o' plush, it looked like, and knee-pants, and full length pants that were so skin tight that if any feller ever got into them without splittin' them to bits—which none of us ever could—why, I don't see how he ever had nerve enough to sit down in company. And there was hats, three cornered ones, and others, that looked like the one Napoleon wears, and tam-o'-shanters and the like. And boots, high and low.

All junk, the lot o' it. When we got it thawed out, whatever coat or pants we tried on, why, it just naturally fell to pieces.

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Make a sudden move, and—zip!—it split ten ways at once.

All except one coat which Joe Bush found. It held together pretty good. It was a bright, blue color, with glass buttons down the front, and swaller-tailed behind, and he looked uncommon queer in it. He was a long, rangy feller, was Joe Bush, with one o' these long, horsey lookin' faces that never cracks a smile, like the two-gun man in the movies, and when he put on this coat, and clapped a Napoleon hat on his head—oh, my eye!

He wore it, too. He loved it. But me and Clancy had to pass up the fancy duds. We found some reefer coats, and tarpaulin pants in this room we'd made our livin' quarters, and they was honest sailor togs, and wouldn't rip unless we got excited. Clancy, o' course, didn't need them; but I did.

I needed boots, too. Them from the cabin just crumpled up after they'd been near the fire, but I poked around and found a pair o' wooden shoes under my bunk. Age hadn't hurt them. They were a god-send, because the pieces o' t'gan's'l I'd wrapped around my feet on the other side o' the cliff had just about worn out. He must have been a splay-footed Dutchman who owned them, because I had to wrap rags around my feet to keep from steppin' out o' them.

We broke out some more stores from the hold, beef and pork both, and more hard-tack. But we didn't find anythin' else fit to scoff. The little stone jars had stuff in them that tasted like black draught when it was thawed out, and the flour and peas we found was just so much cement. We says to each other, "Well, no one ever starved to death on cracker hash."

Clancy and me spent a long time investigatin' the cargo. We wanted Joe Bush to bear a hand, but he wouldn't. He spent a long time tellin' us he wouldn't, standin' at the top o' the ladder, and shoutin' down that we was two sons o' be-lie-all, which didn't make no sense, and that we was scoundrels, sots and bums, which did, and tellin' us about the end o' the world.

That cargo, oh, that cargo! We sampled here, and we sampled there, and we went right out into the main hold, where plenty of barrels were busted open. A cargo o' booze, nothin' but booze. We seen all the colors o' the rainbow, most beautiful colors. We chipped off little pieces, and melted them in our mouths. More rum, we found, and cognac, and a different kind o' schnapps, and two other kinds o' wine beside the port, and a hogshead o' gin that looked like a great hunk o' crystal. We sampled here, and we sampled there, just little mouthfuls, but when Joe Bush called us to supper, why, we was pretty well lit up.

But not drunk, y'understand. Clancy and me never got drunk on that stuff. Joe Bush, himself, was the only one who ever got drunk on that cargo, and he did get all lit up like the burnin' bush he talked about. It was a mistake. I'll tell you about it pretty soon. But Clancy and me, we never got more than sort o' bubblin', so to speak, sort o' happy like and at peace with our fellow man, and willing to shake hands with a wooden Indian, or kiss Joe Bush if he'd let us.

We ate our cracker hash, and sampled what we'd brought up with us, and wondered how much we was worth at prevailin' prices—and pretty soon Joe Bush preached us sleepy, and we crawled in between our ticks.

Well, that was a day, and the other days was just about the same. Especially at first, when we was too busy getting settled to be gloomy. Work, and explore, and sample the cargo—that was what we did for a week.

Joe Bush and me went up the mast and over the cliff, to get the t'gan's'l, but we found the wind was ahead o' us. I had figured on haulin' up the spar to the top o' the ridge, and settin' up a flag signal. But the spar was steel—like all o' the *Marne*—and froze in so deep and tight in the ice it would have taken a crew and a handy billy to shift it.

And anyway, it didn't matter much. That was the —— of it. We was marooned on an iceberg. That's worse than bein' marooned on a desert island. A ship will stand in to an island, but, unless she's got a Mister Kirby on board, a ship won't get no nearer an iceberg than the blink. Besides, we was in lonely, lonely waters. Time was, not so long ago, when the Southern Ocean was lousy with ships, but what with the Panama Canal, and passin' o' sail, there's few ships down there these days. All the time we was on the berg, I made it a practise to go up the mast mornin' and evenin', and not once did I raise a sail.

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Joe Bush and me went explorin' over the low, hummocky ice between the ship and the sea. Clancy wouldn't go. He says he'd stay home and watch the treasure.

It was rough goin', cruel goin', and when we got to the water, why, there was this field just bein' eat away by the ocean. This field of ice was just a sort o' bight between headlands of the cliff, and I guess it wasn't so very thick, and the edge o' it was just steadily breakin' off and sailin' out to sea. Me and Joe Bush pretty near got caught in a break-up, and I was mighty glad then that Clancy wasn't with us, him bein' so slow and fat, and so easy cast down. It would have been just like him to sit down and count the days till the sea had eaten in to the ship. I figured it would be a couple o' months if the weather kept fair. Joe Bush didn't figure. He didn't care. No, sir, he didn't. The Lord had brought him on to this iceberg, and the Lord would take him off again if He felt like it. That's how Joe Bush looked at things.

We was lookin' for a change o' diet. We thought we might find a seal we could club, or somethin' like that. But we didn't. Not a sign. So we knocked over a couple o' penguins and went home, and Joe Bush boiled them for dinner. And we voted we'd stick to cracker hash.

When we got back on board this day, we found out why. Clancy hadn't wanted to come explorin' with us. He had a job of his own on hand.

We heard his whistle as soon as we dropped off the ice on to the deck. That was strange, because Clancy wasn't givin' to whistlin' and the like since the shipwreck. When we got aft we found that he'd spent the day makin' a few changes.

There was a sign stuck up over the door to our cabin. He had carved it on a board, and rubbed ashes and soot in the letters to make them stand out. "Freedom's Last Stand, T. Clancy, Prop." it says. And another sign over the port says, "Wines & Liquors." When we looked in the door, why, there was Clancy large as life, swabbin' a bar with a rag.

Yes, sir, he was. He'd turned our livin'-room, or half of it, into a saloon. He'd taken a couple of planks from the long table in the after cabin, and set them on trestles that he made, and that was the bar. There was even a section o' the ship's rail, layin' on the floor, to put your foot on. He'd washed out all the little stone jars and mugs he could find, and all o' Joe Bush's spare pots, and filled them up with melted drinks. And there he was, all stocked up and open for business, and happier than he'd been since leavin' the What Cheer House.

"Good evenin', gents," says Clancy. "Won't you be after steppin' in, now, and takin' a little somethin'? 'Tis openin' day, and all drinks on the house." And he grinned at us like one o' these here Chesterfield cats you read about.

Joe Bush groaned, and then he give a snort o' contempt, and he turned around and went in by the galley door. After that he always used the galley door, so he wouldn't ever be seen enterin' or leavin' a rum palace. But I went into "Freedom's Last Stand," you bet. Why, it was like comin' home.

I played right up to Clancy. I shook hands with him, and says what a nice place he has, and he couldn't have picked out a better location if he tried.

"And how's business?" says I.

"Brisk," says he. "Can't complain at all. Will ye have a drop o' this gin, now, Mr. Smith—or maybe you prefer some prime old Dutch schnapps? It's a bit quiet this time o' day, but the lads will be droppin' in after a bit."

Well, that's the way we carried on. Just kiddin' each other, just makin' believe as solemn as could be. And it done us a world o' good. It cheered me up fine and took my mind off of what I'd seen out there at the edge o' the ice. And Clancy—well, he'd always been miserable as a sailor in the *Marne*, and now he was back in his old harness, he was behind a bar and feelin' he was some use in the world.

It cheered up Joe Bush, too—though you'd never have thought it from the way he banged his pots around gettin' supper. But it brought back old times to him like it did to us, and after supper he showed how he enjoyed it.

Clancy and me was havin' a good time talkin' over the business.

"You picked out a fine name, Mr. Clancy," I says. "Right up-to-date and in keepin' with the times, and all that."

That made Clancy feel good. He'd thought up that name all by himself. It meant somethin'. It meant just what it said. Wasn't we American citizens? Wasn't we on American soil—or ice, if you want it that



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way? Our bein' there made it American, and the only reason he hadn't run up the American flag was because the dirthy old Dutchman didn't carry one.

And wasn't he runnin' a wide open place? "Freedom's Last Stand" it was called, and that's what it was. The last place on American soil to stick up for personal liberty. He didn't have his stock hid under the bar; no, sir, it was right up on top in plain sight, and no jackass poison either. And his door was open, and his sign was out, and he served notice right now on all the prohibition agents in the U. S. A. that he was doin' business at "Freedom's Last Stand," and they could come and get him if they wanted. He wouldn't run away.

"Ut's a martyr to a great cause I be," says Clancy.

We got a great kick out o' that talk. Makin' believe like a couple o' kids, and it done us good. Joe Bush got a kick out of it too. It give him a chance to make believe, same as us.

He was sittin' reading his Bible as close to the stove as he could get, so no one would suspect him of bein' in the saloon. All at once he said somethin' in the tongues, and I knew right away he'd got an inspiration. He got up and put on his swallertailed coat, with the glass buttons, and his Napoleon hat, and marched out o' the galley door.

Right away he appeared in front of our other door—in front o' the saloon door, you understand—and his fine deep ahoy voice came bellerin' in at us. Poor Joe Bush, he'd have made a fine chanteyman if he hadn't gone wrong.

"The Lord speaketh from a burnin' bush, and his servant obeyeth, and we'll open the meetin' by singin' hymn 223, 'A Drunkard's Grave Is Not For Me.'"

Clancy fair hugged me.

"Holy Saints, the lad's holdin' a street meetin', and in front o' my saloon," he says. "God bless the boy, I hope he does well."

He meant it, too. And so did I wish him well. For nothin' could have made the evenin' seem more homelike and old-fashioned than Joe Bush preachin' outside the door.

WELL, in course o' time, another week rolled by. It was a harder week than the first one, speakin' o' our feelin's, because there wasn't so much work to do. I had to invent jobs to keep Clancy and me busy. "Freedom's Last Stand" was a fine thing of an evenin', but we couldn't keep it up twenty-four hours out o' twenty-four.

After breakfast, I'd have my chores to do, gettin' firewood for Joe Bush, and runnin' up to the masthead to take a look-see—which always made me feel bad, because there never was anything to see except ice and ocean—and takin' a walk on the ice field to stretch my legs, and see how much of it the water had whittled away since yesterday. And while I was doin' this, Clancy would be scrubbin' out his saloon. He was most particular about it, and even Joe Bush would admit that Clancy always kept his house as clean as a pin, and never allowed no rowdies inside.

But all this didn't take very long, and we'd have a day ahead o' us. Well, investigatin' cargo was always the most interestin' pastime I could think of, and Clancy always thought so too.

We began to broach cargo through the main hatch, it bein' much handier than crawlin' around in the 'tween-decks. I chopped a block free from the spanker-boom, and when it was thawed out we could use it. It was all hand made, out o' lignum vitæ. I rove our good line through it—the ship's ropes was all rotten—and rigged up a shears, and then we began to hoist the barrels out on deck.

There was so many o' them we could have worked a year and not emptied the hold. We never stopped to figure out how much it was costin' us to bust so many barrels open. We needed the staves for firewood, and, anyway, even if we was always tellin' each other that tomorrow we'd be rescued sure, why, we never believed it. We were always talkin' about movin' our treasure back to God's country—but it was just kiddin'.

Well, we made some interestin' discoveries down in the main hold. We passed by all the open barrels now, and hoisted out the unbroken ones. It was always most excitin' to guess what was inside. We'd knock away the staves, and there it would be, glowin' and gleamin', maybe a new kind o' wine, maybe a liquor. We'd sample a chip of it, and go down after another barrel.

Pretty soon we had whole rows of barrel-shaped blocks o' ice standing around the deck. They looked gorgeous. The sun never hit the ship direct, because o' the

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overhang of the cliff, but the sunlight would be reflected on the deck by the ice—and, my eye, how things would sparkle! All kinds of pretty colors. It always made me think o' a pawnshop window, and I'd say so. But Clancy would talk fancy about the colors, and about stringin' the jewels and hangin' them about the ice fairy's neck, which was silly, because even if his fairy was bigger than an elephant, why, how would she look with a string o' barrels around her neck?

We'd work this way until Joe Bush called us for supper, and then we'd knock off for the day. After supper, and before we settled down for the evenin'—that was the worst hour of the twenty-four.

We'd get to thinkin' about other places and other suppers; and then there was the evenin' light to help us feel sad and down-in-the-mouth about things. It wasn't no sort o' light for living men to be in.

It didn't get dark, not until pretty near midnight, and then only for a couple o' hours. Instead, it got sort o' gray-blue, a cold, steely sort o' blue. Everything looked most forsaken, lonely and dead-like. It wasn't like bein' in the world, to be out in that light; it was like bein' in some sort o' spook-land. And if a feller stayed out too long, lookin' around, why, he'd get the willies and begin seein' things that never was.

That's the sort o' evenin' hour we had. It was too early to start the game goin', and too late for anythin' else. I'd be thinkin' how gladly I'd swap Clancy's saloon, lock and stock, for one satisfyin' chew o' plug, and Joe Bush would be thinkin' o' his soul, and Clancy would be moonin' over times what are past. In the dumps, the three o' us.

Well, I'd try to start some conversation goin'. Now, I was always wonderin' about this old wreck we was on, what she was, and where she come from, and how she got there, and what sort o' fellers was them that sailed her. We called her the *Jan Groot*, and maybe that was her name, and maybe not. We never got a look at her bows because o' the ice, or at her stern for the same reason, and the letterin' on the beam in the cabin was all we had to go by. It might have been the name o' the Dutchman that built her, or the one that owned her, instead o' bein' the name of the ship.

We never found a logbook or any ship's papers that could have told us anything, and from the fact that there wasn't the sign o' a small-boat on deck, though the skids was there, why, I figured that all hands had got away after she was froze in, and that they took the ships' papers with them. I guess she must have been cast away somewhere around that 1811 date, and maybe she was a Dutch trader to the Plate, or the West Coast, storm drove south to the Pole Barrier, and maybe she wasn't. We did find some writin' in the chests in the after cabins, but it was in Dutch, and none o' us could read the lingo. And now, no one will ever be able to find out about the *Jan Groot*.

Well, I'd bring up this interestin' subject, but do you think I could get them to guessin' about it? Not Joe Bush, not Clancy. They didn't care, and besides they had opinions o' their own.

Clancy didn't care how the ship got there, but he had a yarn about how we got there. The blessed saints done it, says Clancy. All on account o' certain prayers he prayed, while we was sittin' on the ice, the day the *Marne* was wrecked. And the saints heard him, and blew away the fog, and led our stumblin' feet aloft until we looked down on the *Jan Groot*.

That was how Clancy figured it out, and when I pointed how it was Joe Bush that found her, and me that hauled him up the cliff, and him despairin' and wantin' to jump in the ocean and end it all, why, he'd call me a hairy tick and appeal to Joe Bush.

That would start Joe Bush off. He had a theory, too. It was called the doctrine o' the predigestion o' all things, he says, and it explained everything that ever happened or ever will.

The Lord done it. He speaketh, and things was. He grew the earth and the rocks and the trees and He kept his eye on certain o' the trees, and in due time He caused certain Dutchmen to make a ship, and the devil caused them to load her with his own cargo, and then the Lord's hand grabbed that ship and drew her down south and fastened her in the ice. And what for? Because in one hundred years, or so, the Lord was goin' to drag the *Marne* down south and wreck her, and set two besotted sinners and a man o' grace on the ice, and the *Jan Groot* was to be there to save their miserable lives. And there you were. All accordin' to the predigestion o' things.

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Everything figured out right to the end o' the world, which was very nigh, and we'd better give up our superstitions and drunken ways, and listen to the burnin' bush, for time was gettin' short.

That was Joe Bush's theory. When I asked him was the Lord goin' to ship us off the iceberg, accordin' to predigestion, he would just shake his head very solemn, and say the Lord's way to work wonders was mysterious and not yet revealed to him.

We'd stop talkin' about the *Jan Groot*, and maybe wouldn't say anything for a while. And we'd get gloomier and gloomier. Joe Bush would set there with his Bible open, but not readin' it, and I could tell he was thinkin' about what a barren vineyard he had to labor in. Then Clancy would begin to sniff, like he was catchin' cold, and pretty soon he'd bring up the subject o' a girl he once had, and he'd have married her all right, only she up and eloped with a street car conductor from Los Angeles.

I'd see that somethin' must be done, so I'd start the ball rollin' just about that time.

I'd get up and put on my coat and Dutch tam-o'-shanter, and move around very deliberate, like I was gettin' ready for a trip somewhere, and I would say in a casual sort o' way—

"Well, I guess I'll take a turn down the street, and see how things are this evenin'."

They'd brighten right up at that. There'd come a gleam o' zeal into Joe Bush's eye, and Clancy would cough, and make out he was too tired to go with me.

"Give me love to the boys," Clancy would say.

I'd go out through the galley door, and then I'd most always run up to the masthead, to take my goodnight look at nothin', and so as to give the lads a chance to get ready. When I reached the deck again, I'd saunter in through the "Freedom's Last Stand" door, and there would be Joe Bush, in swaller-tail and cocked hat, just goin' out o' the galley door to his evenin's labor, and there would be Clancy swabbin' the bar, and with his bungstarter stickin' up in the corner where he could grab it quick.

He didn't have no use for a bungstarter, but he made one anyway. It made him feel more at home, he says, and it might come in handy in case some o' those roughnecks from the coal docks dropped in sometime.

"Good evenin', Mr. Smith, and how's every little thing this evenin'?" he says. "And have you been paid yet, Mr. Smith, or will I chalk this one up wid the others." Just like he was behind a real bar at home.

"I'm fine, thank you, Mr. Clancy," says I, "and I hope you are the same. No, sir, not today; but the boss says sure tomorrow, and as long as you're chalkin' this up, why, you might join me in a nip."

And then, when that one was down, why, the house would stand treat. And about that time Joe Bush would begin outside, and the evenin' show was on. Sounds —— foolish, but it wasn't. If it wasn't for "Freedom's Last Stand" I think we'd have gone crazy, what with the ice and the loneliness, and nothin' to do.

Well, Joe Bush would preach, and Clancy and me would stand at the bar and talk, and have a nip now and then, and Clancy would say, "And have you see so-and-so, Smitty?" and I'd say, no, I hadn't seen him today, or maybe I'd say, yes, I had, and he sends you his best, and have you seen this feller or that. Just kiddin', makin' believe, and by golly, more than half in earnest about it.

Then, when we'd have enough o' that, Clancy would say—

"Well, have a seat, Smitty, and we'll talk business."

We'd set down on the kegs o' gunpowder we used for chairs. Joe Bush and me found the ship's magazine, one mornin', down near the lazaret, and it was full o' these little kegs o' gunpowder. It was old-fashioned black powder, and froze, o' course. So we carried several kegs on deck, and was thawin' them out gradual, intendin' to use them on the ice in the bows, if it was any good. Meanwhile, they made fine stools, bein' just the right height for a feller's legs.

Clancy and me would be partners after we sat down, and we'd chat about our treasure and figure how many millions each o' us was worth, countin' Joe Bush in for a full third share, o' course, for he was our mate even if he did scorn the snares o' the devil. We'd talk about how lucky we was, and how there wasn't a millionaire in the country—nor out o' it either, for that matter—who had as fine a stock o' wines and liquors as "Freedom's Last Stand."

"Now this one—" Clancy would say, referrin' to the drink we happened to be sippin' at the moment. "Now this one is pretty

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good, but ut ain't our best by a long shot. But what'd John D. give for a barrel o' ut? Or King George? Or the Sultan o' Persia? Or any o' them high-and-mighty lads? But they can't get ut! No, sir, ut's our booze, and we'll keep ut for the poor hard-workin' lads in the street—hey, Smitty, me boy?—and we'll charge them no more than they can pay widout hurtin' the missis and the childer, and we'll make them happy for once in their lives, poor lads."

Well, we'd be pretty cheerful, and you can't imagine how homelike that wreck of a cabin would be lookin', what with the soft light o' the lamps, and the warmth, and that homey sort o' smell that would be comin' from the barrel staves in the fire, and Joe Bush's voice comin' in through the door just like we'd heard a thousand times in the good old days. We'd be happy then.

SO, AS I said, time rolled on until we was two Sundays aboard the *Jan Groot*. That was the day Clancy and me made the great discovery. We knew it was Sunday because Joe Bush wouldn't eat his cracker hash that day, but lived on a double whack o' ice water and prayer, for the good o' his soul and ours.

Clancy and me was workin' down in the main hold as usual, but takin' it easy and not hurtin' ourselves, because it was Sunday, and we felt like a couple o' stevedores putting in overtime. We found some case goods, the first we'd come across, and it turned out to be extra fine schnapps in stone jugs, gallon size. That encouraged us a lot, and we hauled up a big barrel o' yellow wine. After samplin' this, we went down again, and there in a corner o' the hold we hadn't paid much attention to before we saw a stack o' little kegs, in size just about like small beer kegs.

"Well, this looks interestin'," I says. "Let's hoist one o' these babies on deck, and see what's in it."

As soon as we busted open the keg and dumped the cake out on the deck, we knew we'd made a find. Oh, my eye, that color! It was alive; we could almost see that lump o' ice breathe, and that's a fact. Now we was surrounded by jewels, so to speak; barrel-size rubies and topazes and diamonds and what not. But by the side o' this little lump we just found the rest looked like junk. You never seen it, so you'll never know what it looked like—but you just imagine some feller mixin' up two parts sunlight and one part maple syrup, and puttin' it in a keg and freezin' it.

Clancy whittled off a little piece and put it in his mouth. Then, without sayin' a word, he cracked off a big piece and made a bee-line for the galley. All the time he was meltin' it he wouldn't answer a question.

"Wait a minute, Smitty, just you wait a minute," says he.

When it was liquor, he handed it to me. Oh, my eye, it was a treat just to see the colors a-glowin' and a-glowin' in the pan; and the smell o' it, oh, the smell o' it was better than any smell I ever smelled. I took a big swaller, just one swaller, and it went down like it was oil o' roses, and it went into my stummick, and into my legs and my arms, and into my toes and my fingers, and undid all the kinks, and eased off everything, so to speak. Just one swaller.

"Holy smoke, what is it?" I says to Clancy.

"Ut's—ut's amberosia, what the blessed saints, thimselves, drink in hiven," says he.

We was happy. We was so happy we even offered a swig to Joe Bush, thinkin' he needed cheerin' up like we did. But he heaved a pan o' cracker hash at Clancy's head, and says no, he wouldn't have none, because once he too was a sot and bum and a man o' violence, but the Lord spoketh and he heard, and ever since he had ex-chewed the ways o' the vile flesh.

Well, you wouldn't think that findin' one more drink to add to all them we already had would make much difference to us. But it did. That amberosia, oh, that amberosia! There never was the like of it before, and there never will be again. It was like this here what-d'ye-call-it the old boys long ago used to go searchin' for because it would make them young again. A nip or two o' amberosia would have made anybody young. It just took all the worry out o' life, and everything looked rosy, and all the trouble in the world was tucked away out o' sight.

We needed cheerin' up durin' the days that came after we found the amberosia. At least, I did. Because it came on to blow, and was stormy for three days, and a sea got up that just ate into the ice field like a ravenin' monster. I'd go and look every day, and I seen it wasn't a case o' how many months, but o' how many weeks,

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maybe how many days, before the sea reached the ship. And then where would we be?

I didn't say anything to Clancy about it. What was the use o' upsettin' his mind? Joe Bush knew what was goin' on, o' course, but why should he worry when it was all predigested, and everything for the best? It was up to me to do the weepin' and wailin', if any was done; and what I did was make the most o' Freedom's Last Stand and amberosia. Oh, thou amberosia! I won't forget thee if I live as long as old Bamboozelum!

We'd look forward to the evening meal now, instead o' dreadin' it. Because it would be closer to openin'-up time, and Clancy and me had made a bargain we wouldn't touch any amberosia in the daytime, but would only drink it over the bar like civilized humans. So we took to openin' up right after supper.

If we was cheered up, so was Joe Bush. Yes, sir, that lad was havin' the time o' his life. He'd be lookin' for'ard to it all day, tryin' out his voice in song, and rehearsin' bits o' speech. Just as soon as we threw open the doors o' "Freedom's Last Stand," so to speak, why, Joe Bush would be out in the street in front, beginnin' his meeting. His sermons had more fire in them every night, and the hymns he sung was forty verses long.

That amberosia—oh, that amberosia! I tell you it was like ownin' one o' these here magic carpets we read about when we was kids. That amberosia would take us anywhere.

Now, that's a fact. Before we found the amberosia, it was always *if* we had "Freedom's Last Stand" in San Francisco, what a fine thing it would be for the poor public, and what a sensation our stock o' wines and liquors would make. And maybe we'd imagine ourselves there, but it wouldn't be real, just kiddin', just make-believe.

But after we found the amberosia! Why, there wasn't any *if* about it, we *was* there. We never wasted any time figurin' out how to get there; we just took a nip o' amberosia, and there we was, cargo and all, plump in the middle o' town. And it was real; I tell you it seemed as real as could be.

We had trouble findin' a suitable location, and first and last I guess we opened up "Freedom's Last Stand" in every quarter o' the town. Everything was like it was before the war, and the Democrats was in, and prohibition and such-like miseries was never dreamed of. Oh, that amberosia!

We opened up on the waterfront first o' course, but pretty soon Clancy says that neighborhood wasn't high-class enough for our stock in trade. So we moved to North Beach for a while, and it was fine up there, with lots o' Eyetalians who lived near by, and a fleet o' these bohunk cafés where the artists lived, and the Barbary Coast just around the corner. But Clancy says pretty soon that on account o' all the Eyetalians drinkin' nothin' but wine, we'd better move where hard liquor would sell, and we went out in the Mission, and found it was too rowdy. Then we opened up as a roadhouse out at the beach, and that was flossy, with all the automobile trade stopping at the door. But pretty soon Clancy says he don't like the idea o' society ladies and innercent young girls standin' at his bar, and a saloon wasn't no place for women but was a workingman's club, and so we took another nip of amberosia and moved down to Third and Market streets.

That's where we stuck. It was handy for everybody, says Clancy. We fitted up most gorgeous, him supplyin' the furnishin's, and was mobbed by trade, me supplyin' the customers. I'd point out old friends and shipmates in the crowd, and he'd mention last night receipts, and say he thought his bartenders was knockin' down, and wonder if the new captain o' the district was goin' to be friends, and worry for fear Joe Bush would get run over by a jitney bus, out there in the street, for they was awful reckless drivers.

I guess you think we turned that iceberg into a lunatic asulym. But we wasn't crazy. Not by a long shot. And it all seemed real; real as could be. That amberosia!

IT WAS too good to last, and anyway all things have an end, as the sayin' is. And believe me, the end o' "Freedom's Last Stand" was some end! Clancy, he never quite forgive Joe Bush, as I said in the beginnin', but seein' what came o' his act, I could never blame him. Besides, me and Clancy started it. Sometimes I get to thinkin' Joe Bush was right, and it was all predigested and had to end the way it did.

Clancy and me didn't mean no harm to

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Joe Bush. Why, we loved him like a brother. We done what we done for his own good, and with none but kind feelin's back of it. As for Joe Bush—well, I guess he acted like he did because that was the way the spirit moved.

It come about this way. Time had gone rollin' on, and another week had sped past, and it was Sunday again. It was the third Sunday we was on the *Jan Groot*—and the last.

It was Clancy who says to me, or maybe it was me that says it to him—anyway, some one says—

"I wonder how Joe Bush would act with some amberosia inside o' him."

It wasn't the first time we'd said that; but somehow this night it seemed more important. We was sorry for Joe Bush. We looked out the door at him, and when he seen us lookin' he doubled up his efforts and got scorchin' in his talk. He always preached his hottest on Sunday nights, maybe because he only had a gallon or so o' ice water inside o' him. Well, he looked uncommon queer in that ghosty light, what with his hat, and the buttons, and the swaller-tail stickin' out behind him when he waved and pranced. If it wasn't for the noise, he'd have looked like a ghost himself. As it was, we could see how red his nose was from the perishin' cold outdoors, and we guessed maybe it wasn't altogether the spirit that made him dance like that.

It made us feel selfish, us bein' inside by a warm fire, full o' cracker hash and amberosia, and him bein' outside in the cold, with nothin' substantial inside o' him. Yes, sir, it made us feel like brutes. Wasn't he laborin' in a barren vineyard for us? Wasn't he our shipmate?

Somehow, we didn't have so much fun at Third and Market streets that night, and we came back to the *Jan Groot* kind of early. And we got to talkin' about Joe Bush, and what a fine feller he was, and a good cook, and it was a pity he'd die without ever havin' tasted amberosia. Somehow, it didn't seem fair.

So we got to talkin' what a different feller he'd be if he only had a nip o' it, how happy he'd feel, and soft-hearted, and maybe he'd forget the end o' the world for a little while. Just talkin', you understand, just imaginin', and never thinkin' for a moment of doin' anything to him.

Then somehow we fell to figurin' out ways to get him to taste amberosia, takin' a nip ourselves now and then, while we was doin' it. We wasn't drunk, mind you. No, sir, amberosia never made a feller drunk, it just made him happy. Why, we wouldn't have wanted to get Joe Bush drunk.

Oh, that amberosia! It made nothin' o' difficulties, and after figurin' a bit we knew the way to get Joe Bush to taste it was to pour it down him when he was asleep. It all looked simple, and we felt it would be doin' him a good turn. He always slept with his mouth open.

So we closed up the saloon early, and Joe Bush come in through the galley door, lookin' pleased. He thought his words was havin' effect at last. I says to him that we was turnin' in early, because the gunpowder was ready to try out, and tomorrow we wouldn't work cargo, but would try and blast away the ice for'ard, and take a look at the foc'sle. He was pleased some more, because he was always after us to leave the cargo alone.

So we all turned in, and in five minutes Joe Bush was sleepin' the sleep o' the just, with his mouth wide open, and makin' the welcome ring with his snores. That was the signal for me and Clancy to turn out again.

We went and got a little copper funnel that was among the cookin' gear, and a pan with about a pint o' amberosia in it. After we had a nip ourselves, why, we slipped the funnel into Joe Bush's mouth without wakin' him up, and then I sat on him to hold him down, and Clancy poured the amberosia into the funnel. Well, his mouth was full before he woke up, and then he couldn't close his mouth because o' the funnel, and I worked his adam's apple up and down so he had to swaller, and before he knew what we was up to, hardly, why we had the whole pint down him, barrin' a spoonful, no more, which was spilled.

We took the funnel out o' his mouth then, and went over to the bar and stood watchin' him to see what he would do. Now we'd done it we kind o' wished we hadn't.

FOR a minute or two, Joe Bush didn't do anything. He just lay quiet. Then he swung his legs over the bunkboard, and sat there, holdin' his head. He batted his eyes and shook

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himself, and we knew the amberosia was workin' inside. In a minute, says I to myself, he'll be gettin' used to feelin' happy, and he'll dissolve into a big grin and come over and shake hands with us.

But he didn't. Instead o' anything like that, why he began to dress himself slow and deliberate, like he was gettin' up to cook breakfast; and while he kept blinkin' at us, why, he didn't seem to see us no more than if we wasn't there. He didn't dissolve into no smile, but he did begin to sing a hymn, just hummin' it at first and gettin' louder and faster as he went along. He put on his fancy coat and his hat, tappin' time with his foot on the deck; and by that time his tune was speeded up until it just raced. "In the Time o' Solomon," he was singin', and jazzin' it to the limit.

He began to flit up and down the room most graceful like, and doin' heel and toe stunts on the turns; and then he took to leapin' and whirlin', just like one o' these here whirlin' dervishes I seen one time in Port Said. Goin' strong, he was, and not seein' us at all.

He spun himself dizzy and sat down on the table and laughed fit to split himself. So of course me and Clancy thought that everythin' was all right, and that the amberosia was softenin' the harsh chords o' his nature, like we intended it should. Clancy picked up a big pan that had in it about a couple o' gallons o' amberosia, and he stepped over to Joe Bush, and he says:

"I'm proud o' ye, lad. You're doin' fine. Have another nip, and you'll feel better still."

Joe Bush fixed him with a glary eye. Then he jumped up and give a whoop, and he took that pan o' amberosia and heaved it at the fire. It hit the bricks and splattered all over that end o' the room, and the liquor caught fire and started to burn with colored flames most beautiful to see.

It made both me and Clancy mad to see that sinful waste, and Clancy grabbed his bungstarter, and we started in to tell Joe Bush how ashamed of himself he ought to be. But we didn't get very far.

Joe Bush give another whoop, and he pointed to the blaze and says in a voice o' thunder—

"Oh, there is the fires o' hell!" Then, quick as a wink, he grabbed me by the slack o' my Dutch pants, and, though I was bigger than him, he lifted me easy. And he called me a foul imp and was goin' to chuck me into the fires o' hell. He'd have done it too, he was so quick and strong, only Clancy saved me.

Clancy tried to quiet him down, but he didn't have much success because his bungstarter busted first crack, and Joe Bush didn't seem to mind it any more than if it was a flea-bite. But he let me drop, and grabbed Clancy.

Well, we both tried to quiet him and we tried hard, because the fire was spreadin' to the wall, and we wanted to put it out. But we didn't have a chance. Joe Bush wasn't human. He was a bunch o' wild cats turned loose. He give us both the worst lickin' we ever got in our lives. Yes, sir. I got a shiner that lasted for weeks, and it was days before Clancy stopped talkin' hoarse on account o' the maulin' his throat got.

We was all rollin' together on the floor, and bumped into the wood pile. Joe Bush got hold of the axe. That was the last o' our tryin' to quiet him down.

We went flyin' out on deck, with Joe Bush after us. Wild, crazy wild, he was, shoutin' we was imps, and he'd put us in the fire. Any one o' the swipes he made with that axe would have split a feller right in two. But we dodged him in and out among the blocks o' booze, and that wasn't so hard, because every time he came to one he had to stop and swing on it to express his feelin's.

Pretty soon he got tired o' this, and went back into the cabin. We heard him choppin' in there, and the flames began to come out o' the galley door.

"He's wreckin' the fixtures," groans Clancy. "We got to stop him."

I thought so too, but I wasn't worryin' about the fixtures. I was worryin' about the fire, and what might happen if we didn't put it out in a hurry.

So we crept up on the cabin, and looked in at Joe Bush. I seen right away it was too late. Joe Bush had knocked down the bar, and heaped up the fire with barrel staves, and now he was heavin' Clancy's stock at the fire—jugs, and pots and pans full o' booze, which just drenched the wood and made it burn fine. Crazy wild, he was, and even while we peeked at him, he picked up a keg o' gunpowder and threw that.

Well, we was twenty feet away, and more, when the bang came, we both moved so fast. It was like a cannon goin' off, and we

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was both knocked off our feet. It was good gunpowder; we found that out. When we sat up, there was bricks and burnin' wood and jugs o' schnapps rainin' on us. The for'ard part o' our cabin was blown up, and the rest was burnin' fierce.

Joe Bush was sittin' on a cake o' gin near by—right where he landed, I guess—and lookin' down at us. He was black as a nigger, and his eyes were just awful. That's when he dissolved into a grin, and it was one o' these grins that means murder.

CLANCY and me started for the ice field, and you'd have thought we was india-rubber men, we moved so quick. We was up on the ice before Joe Bush reached the rail. It wasn't altogether him we was runnin' away from. We was thinkin' o' the eight other kegs o' powder that was in the after end o' the cabin, and of the half-dozen more kegs we had packed up from below only yesterday, and left in the little room at the head o' the ladder.

We dodged behind the first little hill o' ice, and Joe Bush went ravin' by, wavin' his arms, with the ruins o' his clothes streamin' behind him. Just as we poked our noses out to look at the ship, the big explosion took place.

I guess the whole eight kegs must have gone off at once. It was a roar like the salvo o' a battleship, and for a second all the air was drawn away from us. There was a big burst o' flame, and clouds o' black smoke, and the mizzen mast leaned over graceful-like and fell, and the mainmast, which was the only way up the cliff, slid along the face o' the cliff and came down with a crash. The ice under our feet was shakin' and quakin'.

The red o' the fire showed plainer through the smoke, and in a minute, almost, the whole after end o' the ship was blazin' high, and the other kegs o' powder—them that was frozen—began to go off one by one. Every time one went off, there was a fresh burst o' flame.

Clancy and me sat down and watched it. There wasn't nothin' else to do. We heard Joe Bush away off, bellerin' in the tongues, so we wasn't afraid o' him no more.

That powder just tore the guts out o' her, and scattered the fire, and made a draft like a chimney for the flames. The decks was blown up, or down, and besides all that old wood, there was our rows o' jewels which melted and burned most lovely to see. And there was a whole ship full o' dry wood and booze down below. Pretty soon we seen the hold was burnin'.

I'll say that "Freedom's Last Stand" went out in a blaze o' glory, and it was better than any Fourth o' July fireworks I ever seen. It got dark, it bein' very late, and the flames got golden, and seemed higher, and there was flares o' different colors when the barrels blew up and a film o' steam from meltin' ice. The whole ice wall, all around the field, was like a magnifyin' lookin'-glass, and reflected the blaze in all the colors o' the rainbow. It was marvelous beautiful to look at. I guess anybody at a distance would have thought the whole world was burnin' up.

Clancy and me didn't say much, sittin' there watchin' all our millions burn up. We didn't have no heart for gossip. We didn't even wonder what was to become o' us now.

By and by it got light again, and the fire was dyin' down because so much ice had melted around the ship that the water was puttin' it out. A regular river was comin' down from the cliff. Then, all at once there was a crunchin' and grindin', and it moved under our feet, and then the ice field just opened its jaws and swallered up what was left o' that poor old smolderin' wreck.

That's just how it happened. Crunchin', and grindin', and a crack showed in the field. The *Jan Groot* just settled down into the hole, and there was a loud hiss, and a cloud o' steam—and then the ice came together again, crunchin' and grindin', and there was no more ship, not a sign o' her.

Well, Clancy and me sat there for a long time lookin' at the spot, and not sayin' a word. Then we got up and wandered off toward the edge o' the field. There wasn't nowhere else to go.

There, right at the water's edge, we come on Joe Bush. He was stretched out flat on a cake o' ice, sound asleep, and snorin' like a bugle. Well, first we felt like killin' him right away, and then we thought maybe we'd better wait until he waked up, and we was sure he was sober. So we sat down beside him, and just waited. There wasn't nothin' else to do.

The sun came up above the cliffs, and it wasn't so cold. Clancy and me dozed off too.

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All at once I began to hear—just like a feller hears things in a dream—a sort o' steady thump-thump-thump. But it was all hazy, not real, like in a dream, and I didn't lift my head or open my eyes. After a bit, I heard a man's voice. He says—

"In bow oar."

I lifted my head and opened my eyes that time, you bet. So did Clancy. And Joe Bush popped up like a Jack-in-the-box.

Well, there was a ship's boat, just a few lengths away from us, with four men at oars, and a feller at helm. Yes, sir, there it was. I batted my eyes, and it didn't go away. And out to sea, about a half a mile, there was a big four-masted bark layin' aback.

"Ahoy, there on the ice!" says the feller in the stern sheets, who looked like a second mate, and was.

We was too full up and surprized to say a word. The boat come nearer, and he hailed us again.

"Are you all the survivors?" he says.

I managed to nod to him, at that.

They was layin' the boat alongside now, and the fellers at the oars was lookin' up at us sort o' scared-like, and even this mate was kind o' blinkin' a bit.

"Shipwreck?" he says.

I got my tongue limbered up then.

"*Marne*, o' 'Frisco," I told him. "Rammed the berg, and sunk. We got ashore."

"'Frisco? A Yank?" says he, and blinked some more at us. "Didn't you burn? Wasn't there a ship afire?"

Clancy, he found his tongue at that.

"Yes, she burned," says he. "The Last Stand o' Freedom—and she burned up. Millions and millions, in the best drinks o' this world—burned up." He pointed a finger at Joe Bush. "There's the crazy scut what done ut!" he says.

Then Joe Bush piped up.

"The Lord spaketh from a burnin' bush," says he, "and his servant obeyeth the voice."

Well, them fellers in the boat looked more scared at that. And I didn't wonder, because it come on me sudden that we was a most peculiar-lookin' gang—Joe Bush in the ribbons o' his swaller tail, and the Napoleon hat cocked on his head, with one corner o' it gone, and his face lookin' like a coal-heaver's just comin' off watch, and me and Clancy in our Dutch pants and coats o' a date one hundred years old.

I told the fellers in the boat we was not ghosts, but poor shipwrecked fellers what had just seen hard luck; and when I was sayin' that, a chunk o' ice fell down and near swamped them.

So the mate sings out—

"Well, hop in, if you're comin' with us. We got to get away from here."

We pulled out to the ship in silence, except that the mate did some talking. He told us the bark was the *Rose Ayres*, in guano, to New York, and yesterday they seen the blink o' the berg and stood away, and last night they saw the flare o' a big fire, and the Old Man came about and stood back, thinkin' a ship was burnin' up.

We listened, never sayin' a word. At least me and Clancy didn't. We was too full to talk. But just before we reached the ship, Joe Bush, he turned to us, and he says, softly—

"The Lord's ways are mysterious when wonders He performs."

And Clancy and me didn't feel like disagreein' with him.

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# The Fox of St. John's

by L. Bruce Johns

*Author of "The Man Who Hated Dogs."*

YOUNG Farley Duick, with two mongrels whining at his heels, dragged a hand-sled of provisions around a curve and stood looking down into St. John's River district, the end of his eighty-mile trip over a snow-clodded trail. He had come to kill a fox, a silver tip, whose reputation had reached a Montreal furrier and caused him to bid one thousand dollars, sight unseen.

One thousand dollars meant to Farley marriage to a tar-haired half-breed girl; marriage was freedom from his giant foster-father, Redos Silva. One thousand dollars, marriage and freedom from the bondage of Silva meant later a farm in the Blackfoot Irrigation district in Montana, just across the line. And behind the boy, pushing like an avalanche of snow, was his eager youth of nineteen bitter Winters spent near Tête de Chat Landing at the source of the South Saskatchewan, which made him believe rivalry was the sport of life.

Redos Silva was in St. John's forest before him, a canny trapper, cruel, who had left behind him the hatred and suspicion of every man and woman at the Landing. Duick expected to find him at his hut and do the cooking; instead, rounding the last curve of the trail coming down from where he had stood surveying the district, Silva reared up before him.

Redos swung his revolver into his hand from his left hip and stood facing the boy in sullen silence.

"Silva! You scare me almos'!" cried the boy.

The dogs were already fleeing down the trail in limp-tail rout.

"What you come out here for?" roared Silva.

"Trap, Silva. Thata pretty fox."

The boy's voice trailed away suddenly as he stood there looking into the flashing eyes of his step-father.

"I think mebbe you got plenty other skin and le' me help a little," he urged. "I cook."

"You do ——!" snapped the giant. "You —— soon go home right now!"

"But you ain't scared a me," pleaded the boy with what he considered tact. "You ketch 'em all, Silva. You mighty, darn, big, wonderful hunter, Silva. You don't care I try for thisa one. You ain't scared a me, Silva. You almos' seven feet big."

Silva's anger rushed into a great bellow of laughter. Scared of this kid, scared of the "soft head" who spent his time learning from that little, white-haired fool of a priest, scared of this boy whose Blackfoot mother he had once beaten into a senseless bundle of humanity and thrown over his mule! He reached out, grabbed the boy by his collar and struck him with a padded hand across the ear-guard. He laughed again. Scared of the weakling who allowed every living animal in his traps to go free and who only kept those already frozen dead!

"Thata pretty fox mebbe eat you up," he guffawed.

Duick rubbed his ear. The cold had eaten under the flap and his head stung him into a showing of blundering anger.

"The Fox of St. John's," copyright, 1922, by Bruce Johns. 

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"You gimme chanst! I show you, Silva!"

Instant suspicion glittered in Silva's small eyes. He stared at the boy narrowly, but his words showed no sign of his feeling.

"You show me! You won't know it when you see her. Or mebbe it jump and cut your throat!"

"Father Ricard," said the boy, edging to the rear of his sled, "told me the markin's. 'Clean, snow-white head and ears,' he say, 'silver down the back in wide strip to tail; tail white as *Noël* storm.' You gimme chanst at her!"

"Thata man's job, you Duick," said Silva. "You know mebbe ten trapper try on thata fox? You know mebbe them ten fuul get into fight over thisa forest? You know mebbe Mule-ear Crow get kilt over her, and one a them Mounted come here and make ——?"

Farley was now behind the sled.

"You scart a me," he charged. "I stay here by myself somewheres."

Silva surveyed his undesired visitor thoughtfully. Then he made his decision.

"Listen, you Duick. You come to hut. You do cookin' for me. I give you place to hunt thisa fox. I know where she's at. I seen her twicet. I got better place to hunt. I don't care for her. You can have her."

It was Duick's turn to stare.

"Mebbe thata pretty fox ain't in the place you give," he said flatly.

Silva flared again.

"Listen, you Duick!" he roared. "You take what I give! I boss a you. I give you thata fox run! No more! You get offa thata run and mebbe bullet hit you awful —— hard somewheres!"

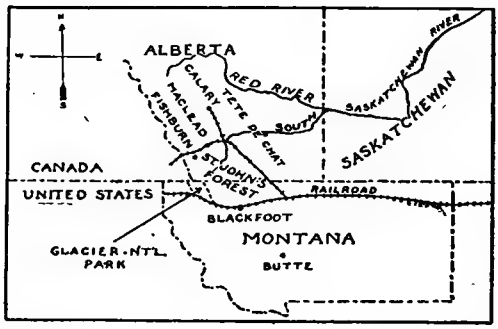
He turned and walked away. Farley called to his mongrels and took up the leader of his sled. The giant was plunging down off the trail into the snow.

"You stick to trail," he called back. "Find hut thata way. Make supper. I be back hour or two mebbe. You leave hut afore I come back and I smash your face all up."

Young Duick dragged his sled down from the bluff and found the clearing. At the rear of the hut was a small shed where he bundled his precious dogs into the bedding of a mule, whose wolf-picked bones had long found a final bed elsewhere. There he left his sled, and shoed around to inspect the hut.

As he stepped inside the first objects which met his eyes were Silva's traps, ungreased and rusty on the walls.

Duick sat down on a box and put his rifle against the broken table. He drew off his mittens while his eyes stayed fastened on the traps. Then he slowly swung his gaze up to the rafters. A few old raccoon and




skunk-pelts hung there. Duick blew out his cheeks in a low whistle of surprize. His boots creaked as he crossed the floor and pulled open the mouth of Silva's duffle-bag. He thrust in his arm and after feeling around a little drew out a portly roll of soiled bills. He dropped them hastily and pulled the tie-rope, but stood staring at the canvas sack.

A moment later he had stepped over to the hanging traps and run his bare fingers down the dry and dirty teeth. He pulled loose a musty tendon of a rabbit caught in a hinge. It was dried and many months old.

Duick stood lightly balanced, deciding.

Rusty traps—a few mangy pelts—that great wad of money—Silva saying he didn't want the silver tip— A great wave of curiosity swept the boy off his feet.

He snatched his rifle and snowshoes and fled out the door before he might change his mind.

OF NELS DUICK, the boy's father, little was known. He came to the mountains as a big, blue-eyed Scandinavian wanderer after beauty, an easel and paint-box strapped to his back. He found in the mad, rushing rivers, the appalling heights of the mountains and the blackness of the forests something he did not have the skill to paint and turned to a little Blackfoot woman, looking for the happiness he could never attain.

Father Ricard had married them. Months

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passed. Nels Duick's small patrimony ran out. Then one day it was suggested by his wife's friends that he take up trapping and earn a "respectable" living. Duick's big, sentimental eyes filled with pain at the injury to his pride. He did not believe in killing, he said, could not bear to see a slain animal. Then, when he was pressed by the necessity of meeting the future as a father, he took the easiest road, packed his easel and disappeared.

After his mother had gone too, the one guide in the boy's life became Father Ricard, the little priest, who had given his best years to bringing some happiness and comfort to the bitter life lived in the hardy village, and who in turn had gained pleasure by teaching Farley the value of life.

Plodding through the snow, his brain afire with curiosity about the strange action of his master, the boy's thought swung back to the little chapel at the Landing and the last conversation he had with his mentor. It had been all about Redos and it came now into his mind, clear and intact, as he thought upon why a trapper did not trap.

"Oh, *mon fils*, it is a great pity," Father Ricard had said, "that our people should kill for their daily bread. But God knows this land has only pelts to offer His children, and He must forbear to punish.

"You, Farley, are a youth of the soil. You hate to kill because I have taught you, and you are the son of Nels Duick. There is much of your father in you. It is good that it is so, and you must drench your flames of temper when Redos calls you—what is it? Aye, soft. Temper, Farley, is a sin. Let it not lead you into the evils of Redos Silva."

Farley had bent his head obediently.

"Silva—Duick, I speak only to your ears—I want you never to be like that man. Do you know he is wealthy, Duick, richer than any man in these mountains? And how? Aye, if I knew! This last season I sent for him pelts that brought three hundred dollars. Is that enough to buy many new mules and live well all year as he does?"

Farley's eyes had become fastened on those of the priest, who continued now impressively.

"There is something wrong in the St. John's forest. I hear Silva does not hunt the silver-tipped beauty. Yet he tells us he traps there because of it. I fear there is more than the silver tip at St. John's. I have never known men to deceive me like this before, *mon fils*, and prosper long.

"But you love the soil only." Here Farley nodded emphatically. "To live here you must kill. Have you thought of the new lands opening in Montana, less than one hundred miles below? There is a new county there, Glacier, where land is cheap for those who are brave and serious men. Your people, the Blackfeet, are there. They have just received their patents, and the land is open. You would find the sister nation below a good guardian for your citizenship, Duick."

Young Duick had shifted his boots and sunk his head.

"Thisa place, Montana, cost money, father."

"Yes, Duick;" the priest replied, "but do not be ashamed for your lack of money. There is happiness beyond that."

Duick, soothed by the soft tongue of his friend, raised his head and felt drawn to confide.

"Thata Peena Sarge girl——"

Father Ricard smiled and settled back in his chair as if the conference were ended.

"Would like a farm," he had said. "Aye, the worries of youth are mountains of air blown from the pipes of imagination."

Duick thought much of this conversation, and it urged him on to greater speed with his shoes.

He swung off the trail with the agility of a wolf following a deer and went into the underbrush, his eyes paining as he held them on the tracks. Duick came to a coulée and saw that Silva had just mounted its side to a little plateau he knew the terrane indicated. Whipping off his snowshoes, he climbed the incline. A strong wind was quickly wiping out Silva's tracks and he knew by the depth of the impressions that the man was not far ahead. He pressed forward, utterly and blindly lost in his desire to fathom a mystery.

"What you want follow me?"

Young Duick suddenly felt himself lifted into the air by the collar of his mackinaw and planted with a jolt upon his feet. He stood looking into the eyes of Silva, fearing the coming moments.

"Le' go, you Silva!"

The giant held the boy a little tighter and shook him so violently that his fur cap went over one ear and the rifle and snowshoes he grasped in his hands flew from his fingers.

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"I see you comin' thata way."

Silva pointed his free hand toward the trail below.

"What you want follow me?" he repeated.

"Le' go, you Silva!"

Silva shook him again.

"I teach you follow me."

A big hand crashed down upon the boy's cheek like a leaded boxing-glove.

"Thata kind good for you. More comin' from shoulder. You wan't more mebbe?"

Duick struck out suddenly with his left arm and his mitten went fruitlessly into Silva's well-padded stomach.

"Huh!" The big Portuguese smiled.

Then he lifted the boy clear of the ground, struck him full in the face and dropped him. Duick arose and rushed, blindly swinging his arms. Silva, while his lips played in a malicious, wavering grin, whipped his mittens from his fingers and sent his bare knuckles into the boy's face.

Blood came suddenly from Duick's mouth, but he continued his blind rushes, driven frantic by rage that had burst into physical action after smoldering ten years.

The boy was now against the man's breast; he clung there desperately while Silva brought up his knee and struck the boy in the pit of the stomach. Farley groaned and fell.

Silva followed his advantage, lifted the boy by his collar and sent a swift and forceful blow again to his mouth. Then he walked away from the unconscious body.

For a moment Duick lay inert. Then, as he writhed over on his face, his hand touched the rifle. He opened flooding eyes and saw a dazed and floating image of his conquerer walking less than a hundred yards away. He watched sullenly, attempting to clear his eyes. Silva did not look back. Duick brought up the gun and threw off the safety.

He rested the gun carefully on a rock before him, brought its sight on the moving shoulders and then reduced it down to points. He squirmed a bit, waiting for the moment when his eyes should clear. Silva carried an automatic rifle and a huge silver-scrolled revolver. It would not do to miss.

He waited. There came a delicate patter of feet in a snowy sumac bush at his side. Duick straightened his head to catch the sound. It did not come again. He swung his attention to the object before him on the trail. It must be a shot of about one hundred and twenty yards now, he thought. He began to squeeze steadily on the trigger.

In that moment the frosted sumac parted; a fox sailed across the gun's sight and was gone. A wide, white ribbon gleamed on its back. Duick leapt to his feet.

The silver tip!

He forgot Redos, forgot murder, forgot himself and the bursting pain in his head. He scrambled for his snowshoes and buckled them on with shaking fingers.

A moment later he was sliding down the coulée on the trail of the dainty tracks.

Before he had gone two hundred yards he knew his quest was hopeless. A steady wind was wiping out the prints. Young Duick, cold, weary from the severe beating, sat down on a stump and surveyed the pitiless country. Before his thoughts ran the vivid image of the silver fox. He must remain. And there crystallized in him the knowledge that food and shelter lay in the hut of Redos Silva. Defeated temporarily, he turned and plodded back to the hut.

THE hut, which stood jealously guarded by two huge firs, was a crude affair, once the permanent home of some trapper before the district was thoroughly plucked by an over-abundance of zealous fur-hunters. It squatted in a rickety manner, its roof caved slightly from the weight of many Winters' snow, and its logs peeled of bark by years of constant, decaying moisture. Inside, its principal furniture was a broken iron stove, two shattered chairs and a bunk. Farley was to sleep, he knew, on a pile of sacking in another corner.

A big fireplace, partly fallen in, the ashes of which resembled a garbage heap, took up half of the north side. Long strings of jerky, the resting-place of countless flies which always managed to survive the Winter, hung from the blackened rafters. There were gums on the walls and also old pieces of harness which had not been touched since the other owners gave up the hut. A filthy, boot-eaten bear-skin lay rumpled and muddy on the floor, to be perhaps the precarious bed of the mongrels when they found the low door open. The dogs were also to find the garbage heap in the fireplace a good hunting-ground for bones and bits of half-cooked meat.

When Duick came to the shack he found it empty except for the dogs and started

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a fire to warm a pan of stewed jerky. He heard the giant coming a minute later. Silva was singing. The two mongrels in the shed barked sullenly from under the straw pile.

Duick hurriedly threw more wood on to the fire and gave an anxious shake to the pot. He became nervously aware that he had failed to make coffee, grabbed up the blackened can and set it on the reddened stove, the spilled drops giving a hissing indication of his haste.

Silva stumbled in, drunk. The boy stood over the fire trying not to notice it. He had always found some safety that way.

"Grub!"

Farley filled a tin plate with the stew, snatched a hunk of boiled salt pork from another pot, dropped it upon the mess and carried it to where Silva sprawled upon the bunk.

"Coffee!"

The boy brought him a tin cupful.

"Rotten!" said the man before he had tasted it.

Farley made no comment, but filled his own plate and cup and began to eat, sitting near the little stove on an upturned log. He had not looked directly at his master since Silva came in. Now, as he busied himself with his iron knife and spoon, he peered once through his heavy eyebrows and saw with a growing fear that Redos was gathering his wits for one of his rare speeches. He bent again and gulped his food until he heard his companion cast his cup and plate to the floor.

"You Duick!"

"Aye?" said the boy, raising his cup to drink and peering over it.

"I think I marry this Peena Sarge girl."

"Aye!" There was tactful acquiescence in the boy's tone as he answered the drunken giant.

Silva ran his thick tongue through his teeth and over his mustache like a dog after a hearty meal.

"You have drink with me on it," he commanded. "We cheer oursel'. You get new mother."

"Don't need no mother," the boy forced himself to say. "Anyway she —— young, thata Sarge girl, to be my mother!"

Silva nodded, grinning.

"You wan' her," he said complacently.

The boy said nothing.

"Huh!"

Silva brought his big fist down on the stiffened blankets.

"No guts, you Duick!"

Silva slipped off the bunk, came to the boy and swayed his great body over him. Farley scraped his empty plate with his spoon, feigning occupation and lack of interest.

"Thata Sarge girl ain't yourn, boy! I got money, horses, hut! What you got?"

"Nothin'."

"Aye. Nothin'. Not even guts 'nough to kill a hunk a fur in trap. But money. That's him. Money! I got him. Girls like rich men, you Duick! That's me, boy!"

Farley put his plate carefully on the stove and stamped the spillings from his trousers. Then he raised his five-foot-eight before his tormentor.

"You Silva!"

Silva smiled.

"You Duick," he answered evenly, "get outa here —— fas'!"

Nineteen-year-old Farley sprang against his body. Silva, taken unawares, staggered back and struck the bunk. The boy came on. Silva steadied himself a second, brought his head down and charged. Farley went back and Silva followed, raining blows in the air. Duick blundered into the blows and went down, the cut on his mouth opening again and spilling blood down his chin.

Silva stood over him and smiled. The boy made an attempt to gain his feet, but the sudden heavy pressure of a knee on his thigh held him down.

"I fight you gun!" screamed the boy.

Silva's smile broke into a laugh. Then he sprang away and darted in again like a clever wrestler, lifting Farley in his arms. He carried him to the door, kicked it open and cast his burden into the snow pile that lay below the eaves.

Farley dug himself out to hear the door slam and a great laugh follow it. He struggled to his feet and peered through a hole in the oiled-paper window. Silva had thrown Farley's rifle, knapsack, snowshoes in a heap on the floor and was taking down a revolver from a rack. The boy fled.

He had made fifty feet when he heard a shout and dropped into the snow.

"Hey, you Duick!"

"Aye?" Farley called back and dug into the snow.

"Take thisa with you!"

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The door slammed.

Farley lifted his head and saw his rifle nose down in a snow heap, his sack, revolver, two packages of crackers and three cans of tomatoes scattered about. He crept forward for his beloved guns and crawled way with them again to the snow-dune. He waited some minutes, hearing nothing. Then he hunched himself along the ground and snatched the other things. He retreated again to the snow-dune.

"Hey, you Silva!" he called finally.

Silva opened the door and stood there smiling. A hundred thoughts of murder rushed into the boy's head when he saw the man was unarmed.

"Aye?"

"Shells," replied the boy.

Silva grunted and went into the cabin, returning a minute later carrying a filled bandolier and three boxes of shells which he threw into the snow.

Farley retrieved them all and after a time crept around to the shed where he called out his dogs. He pulled out his little sled, packed the offerings from Redos on it and dragged it away. The dogs, smelling adventure, leaped away, their noses into the wind.

THAT night found Farley ten miles closer to the border where he was encamped in a cave, which he determined to make his home. The foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains above Glacier Park are heavily wooded, and with the aid of his trail ax and the other tools he carried on his sled, Farley soon succeeded in constructing a floor and a door for his cave. Personally he needed little more. The dogs fared as usual in the snow.

The situation had many advantages, but the best of them were that he was off the beaten track of Silva and still close to his regular run of his traps and the haunt of the silver tip.

Urged by the pressing necessity of immediate food, the boy shot a small bear, added its sweet carcass to the crackers and the tomatoes, determined not to leave until his trap snapped the leg of the one thousand-dollar fox and, except when thoughts of the tar-haired girl entered his head, he forgot Redos.

Duick made a trip to his traps early one day before he had made his new home even hint at anything like comfort. The first three were empty, but the fourth held a little fox very much alive. The boy stood over it, estimating it was worth more than twenty dollars to him. He wished it had been dead, and was about to turn away resolving to let it die when the little beast stopped its struggles and brought up its soft eyes to the boy's.

Young Duick suddenly knelt in the snow beside it, placed the butt of his rifle firmly on its throat and head and released its leg. Then he jumped up and stood watching the creature limp away. "Mebbe other one dead in other snappers," he explained hopefully to his conscience.

But every other trap was found open-jawed. He plodded homeward, angry as usual at being "soft."

"Thata Redos right talker on me," he muttered.

Suddenly he stopped and listened. From somewhere ahead he had heard a call. A moment later he thought it was answered farther below. He hurried on to his cave to await the newcomers.

A rider loomed up in the snow and drew rein.

"Hello there, lad!"

"How do."

"Got room for two for the night?"

"Aye."

"Good."

The boy stood looking the stranger over with interest which his short answers belied. As the newcomer dropped from his horse, Duick saw he was a big fellow, standing well over six feet and entirely clothed in a great coat of fur, a cap of the same material and with striped blue trousers tucked in knee boots.

"Constable Remick," the arrival explained.

"Mounted," added the boy.

"Marshal Joe Caire behind."

"Montana?"

"Yes."

"Together?"

"Yes. Got dogs, eh? What you doin' with that hand-sled?"

"Packin'," Duick informed him shortly. "Ain't got no horse yet."

The marshal from Montana came in a few minutes later, trailing three pack-mules and another horse.

"Hello there, kid!"

"How do."

"Ham and aiggs at this here hotel?"

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"Mebbe—you got them egg and ham in them packs," replied the boy suddenly warming up to his new friends.

Marshal Caire slipped from his horse and threw off the panniers of the first mule.

"This here coulée looks good for the horses tonight," he said. "Dry 'n' everythin'."

Farley lent an experienced hand at the bags.

"Snappin' an'mals, you got," he said, banging one of them over the head with his mitten to make him take his foot off a pack rope.

"But some legs and wind, kid. All the way from Babb since this early A. M. Pretty good, eh?"

"Kinda," admitted the boy, not having any idea where Babb was.

Then he put a rare question for St. John's Valley.

"What you two doin'?"

"What you doin'?"

"Fox."

"We're after some, too."

"It ain't mebbe a big female with silver markin's?"

"Silver's there all right, kid. Lots of it. Gold, too, I got a idear. But ain't no reg'lar an'mal, kid. It's hooman."

"Aye," said Farley. "That's a' right, mister."

THAT night Farley heard that human beings often had prices on their heads. He became acquainted, too, for the first time with alluring facts of the country below the line. He knew the Mounted Police by sight, of course; had seen them often on the trail-patrols and once when the silver tip had caused a shooting in Father Ricard's parish. Caire, however, was the fi st United States officer he had ever seen, and Farley wondered much at the ruggedness of him and the skill with which he handled his train. He thought all police but the Mounted lived in cities, took bribes and got into scandals and into their own jails. Father Ricard's stories were responsible, possibly, for this impression.

The boy was surprized, too, at how close-mouthed both of his visitors were concerning their errand. But they were very friendly, and as they sat around the fire at the door smoking when the supper was over, he went directly to the point.

"Who you after?"

"Wish we knew, kid," said the marshal. "Must seem kinda funny seein' a U. S. man and a Mounted roaming together, but half the time up here we don't know what country we're in anyhow and friends are what counts in the wilds, boy. Both on the same job."

"What the fellas done?" persisted the boy.

"Well," said the marshal, "we come up to see if you fellas caught any pink-tailed reindeer hereabouts."

"Aye," said Farley with finality. "Le's go bunk!"

"Aw, quit fooling the lad, Joe," said the constable.

"S'help me, God!" replied the marshal.

"Well, lad," began the constable, "it's true we know dashed little about it. However, both governments have rewards of five thousand dollars for every man of the gang caught, and governments don't do that without knowing something."

"Five thousand dollars a lot a' money," said Farley.

"Yea," said Caire, "but we don't get it. This is plain duty for us guys."

"Aye," continued Farley, "but you fellas know what the gang done."

"We only know," said the marshal, "that the gang's point of operation is here somewheres. Ever know one of the greatest tribes of remainin' Indians is the Blackfeet crowd down along side of the National Park?"

"Aye, but what's a national park?"

"Well, it maks no diff, son. The Indians are there and just got their patents. And somebody, kid, is raisin' Cain with 'em."

"Stealin' their money, eh?" said Farley definitely.

"Well," continued the marshal," you're right and you ain't."

Marshal Caire tipped an imaginary bottle to his lips and swayed his body.

Duick decided he was being made "a —— coyote a' " and told them so in no uncertain terms. The constable at this point, wishing both to conserve his information and the boy's feelings, allowed the conversation to swing without effort to the new Blackfoot irrigation project—and it was midnight before Duick ended his flow of questions.

FARLEY found himself dreaming of rewards. The season was advancing and soon the quest for the silver tip would be ended, unsuccessfully. He began to wish Redos was the leader of



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the gang which was disrupting the peace of the Indians, that he could find the real secret of th trouble. The pecuniary value of the arrest would be worth five silver tips.

He thought about this in his lonely nights after his visitors had gone. They had told him before they left they intended going to Fishburn and perhaps Macleod. That meant at least ten days before he would have company again.

Loneliness took him shoeing back to Redos' hut where he prowled about at a safe distance. Farley saw Silva come in with his horses and noticed they were fagged. Silva staggered a bit and kicked his team very much in the unhitching.

A blinding, break-up storm was coming on and Farley fought his way to his cave and remained there three days without daring to venture farther than to feed the dogs.

On the fourth day he went out in the freeze to inspect the traps. That Redos had come upon them he realized before he had shoed to the first. Great tracks led directly to it, and when Duick found it it was broken and thrown aside.

He went on, his heart failing as each trap was found. To the very last they were beyond repair. The boy knelt beside the last and began to weep. Kneeling there he pictured big Redos stumbling upon the first trap. He saw how the bleary eyes of him grew savage and red when he discovered the boy had not returned to Tête de Chat Landing, was perhaps still prying into his daily movements in the forest.

Redos must have been drunk, the boy thought, for no one knew the value of traps better than the giant. The boy pictured in his mind how the man had reached down, uprooted the chain and its peg as if it were a weed, and then, straining his great back, had cracked it apart like so many twigs.

Redos could do just that. Farley remembered how Silva had once injured a horse so badly with his fist that the animal had to be shot. He knew, too, how it was inevitable that Redos should find the remainder of the traps once he had found the boy's foot-run between them.

And kneeling there, young Farley Duick found the blood of his mother clashing with that of his father. To kill a cougar was all right. This was because panthers were great, vicious brutes, enemies in Winter to those who plodded the trails.

Redos was drunk. His path told the story as the boy followed it. Duick, as he raced along, had his right hand bare to the cold that he might use his finger quicker on the trigger.

Then he came to the mound of rock at the top of which he had received the beating only a short time before. He was wiser now. He unbuckled his snowshoes, left the trail of Redos and came up the side of the rock at the far end. Then he thrust his gun over the top boulder and followed it with his eyes along the side. The plateau was empty.

Across the snow he saw the trail of Redos go into the pines. He slipped on his snowshoes and skirted the plateau, striking the trail afresh far above. Suddenly he stopped and fell on his face as if he had been felled by a blast. A bullet whimpered through the salmon-berry bushes at his side. Lying in the snow, Farley unbuckled his shoes and wriggled into the underbrush. After a long silence, a great dark figure blundered past. Farley raised to his elbow, but the cold and the proximity of the bullet had set his hand to shaking. The breath whistled through his teeth as he watched the figure go out of range.

The rebound storm met him before he had neared his cave, and after feeding his dogs he sat listening to the fury outside, knowing Redos could not attempt to find him for several days.

In the last two days of the storm, Farley struggled through to Silva's hut. He felt he must end it soon. The loneliness was beginning to tell. He kept the dogs in his cave at night now to hear them breathe in the darkness and to know he was not alone.

During both trips he waited many hours in the cold, but never saw Redos. Once he glimpsed a bottle hurtled through the remainder of the paper window and land in the snow, but nothing else.

The next day the storm ceased and he went out again toward the hut. He found it silent except for the horses whinnying at the rear. There were no new trails in or out of the cabin.

The boy made full reconnaissance and decided to approach. He crept under the window and after listening for a long time peered through.

Redos lay asleep on the bunk. By the number of bottles on the floor the boy realized his enemy had been drunk all during the storm.

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Farley brought up his gun and eased it through the window. A perfect shot through the rear of the head! Then Redos laboriously heaved himself over and lay again moaning in his sleep. A perfect shot through the forehead! Duick dropped his aim a minute as into his mind rushed a thousand thoughts.

When the police came back from Fishburn they would find Redos with a little blue hole in his forehead. Murder, of course. The caliber of the bullet; in their first trip in only one other person in the region; tracks at the window and beyond—the freeze was already on—questioning; blank terror; confession.

The trail—Macleod—Regina—Hanging.

That was what it would cost. He counted the future as a total loss anyway. Yes, he would pay, but Redos must pay first. Somehow it appeared easy. There were no pleading eyes here, no little fur body begging for its life, no iron jaw snapped piteously into a leg.

He brought up his rifle again, but before he could pull the trigger another and more potent picture rushed into his brain. The tar-haired girl. He saw, too, a big rock fireplace and a little white-haired man sitting before it in a deep chair.

"*Mon fils*, what have you done? It is a great pity our people must kill. I taught you that temper is a sin. You, who hated to kill a little fur beast for your living, have killed a man."

The gun eased itself back into the boy's hands. He slunk away.

OVER the trail to the mound went Duick again. He feared nothing now. Redos was asleep. Drunk.

He raced over the plateau and through the pines. The old trail of Silva was gone, but he remembered the general direction and that was enough. Something lay over there, and he must know what.

He went over a hill and into a valley and then over a hill again. Plodding ahead, he was stopped short by a well-cut trail that showed even with the recent storm that it had been much worn. It appeared to start from no definite point. It led toward the border.

Farley retraced his steps. Then he took off his snowshoes and started to make a great circle with its center the point where he had come upon the new trail.

The boy came out from among the pines and stopped before a gulf in the snow. A pine had fallen across it in the three-day storm. He threw off the safety of his rifle and stalked forward. He peered in. It was a bear-pit.

Much snow had fallen on the guide branches below. Nothing stirred in the big trap. He arose and peered curiously at something he had not noticed before. It was a little log-cabin, cleverly wedged between two crags of rock. A tree had fallen there, too, disclosing the little hut to any one who might stumble upon it.

Farley Duick looked at the cabin and then at the trap before it and felt a sudden great fear come over him. He might have walked into it with unfamilar feet. He went around the hole and found the door sealed by a padlock. There were no windows.

Placing his rifle against the lock, the boy fired one shot into it. As the shot died away into the foot-hills above, Duick stopped and listened. He was sure he had heard a movement in the bottom of the pit at his feet. He crept back and looked down. Two brilliant eyes and a scrambling body creeping out of the heap of snow at the bottom!

"*Mon Dieu. Mon Dieu. Mon Dieu*—" he prayed.

He kneeled there a moment watching the beautiful fox attempting to hide.

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* Give me stren'th!"

He gripped his rifle and his mitten-padded fingers trembled as he attempted to throw off the safety, which he had already dropped in firing position when he stumbled upon the pit. He felt weak and cold, but sweat oozed from his hair and dropped suddenly on his cheek with a splatter that felt like a blow. He wiped it away and swore.

"Stren'th, *Mon Dieu!*"

Suddenly it came to him. He knew now what he must do.

He turned deliberately and began cutting limbs from the fallen pine. These he cast into the hole. At last he saw the branches appearing above the top, and he went back to the cabin and sat down very wearily on the step. He was utterly wretched, utterly bitter and utterly fallen in the ways of his fellow men.

"I cain't. The little beast—the little wonder——"

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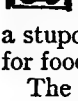
He was muttering to himself like this when he saw the fox with a silver ribbon on its back spring clear of the top of the pit and race away. Then the boy breathed hotly through his mouth and wept.

At last he arose and turned into the hut. Whisky. Tier after tier.

Inside, too, were panniers, harness, a few sacks of grain. Inside the door, knocked from it to the floor by the jar of the shot, lay a note. Duick mustered all of the learning drilled into him in the past by Father Ricard and read it through twice.

"Silva—took load. Where —— you lately. Stick around on Tusday. Must see. Marshal Cair and mtd geting nosy. Must make new rout. Blackfeet got lot money now. Better clean up on them with the stuff and quit. Cair and mtd to —— nosy for packing much more. Think better cancel all rr. pickups on big run and quit cold when stuff here pedled to them indian. You ought be here so fix this, Redos. Be here no fail me Tusday. Deveiz."



AN HOUR later Farley Duick looked through the paneless window and saw Redos lying inside in a stupor. At the rear the horses whinnied for food.

The boy looked at the note which he had gripped in his padded hand since he had found it. He had not dared to trust it to his clothing. It inalienably fastened the liquor-running on Silva.

He stared again through the small opening. Silva lay limp, his mouth open, a lock of black hair fallen over his forehead. There would be no blows, not even a tussle. He would merely tie him up.

And tomorrow there'd be the police—the letter—the trail—Macleod—Regina—five thousand dollars—Peena Sarge—Montana!

Farley found a leather trace near the shed, tested it and, with his rifle well balanced in his left hand, softly pushed open the door. He walked with the confident tread of a Blackfoot. There was no longer any hesitation in his face.

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# MAMOTI the WITCH-WOMAN

By Santie Sabalala

*Author of "Umlimo, Lobenguella's Witch-Doctor," "A Royal Divorce," etc.*

A WITCH-DOCTOR is the positive factor in native medical life; a witch-woman is the negative factor. The witch-doctor and the witch are in direct opposition to each other.

Whereas the witch-doctor is constructive and has the interest of the community and tribe at heart, a witch is self-centered, malicious and cruel.

The witches have a following almost as large as the witch-doctor's, but never larger, and between these two opposing forces in native life is the medicine man. He is friendly with both parties, but is more so to the witch-doctor than the witch, one reason being that the former is able to recommend him in the lesser cases that he may not care to handle himself.

In most cases the medicine man has his own practise, which covers a wide territory indeed—sometimes as large as the whole district inhabited by his tribe. It all depends on how cunning a herbalist he is, and how potent his medicines are.

The three—*quira*, medicine man, and witch—work to different ends. The first two constructively; the last, as has been stated, absolutely looking and working for personal gain.

She is a living ghoul, soul-cannibal or spirit-vampire.

CHILDREN'S voices, excitedly talking at the back of a certain hut, were borne to several women sitting on the ground in front of the lower door. They looked at one another with quick, sly, sidelong glances every now and then. The two farther away from the door had just dropped in for a social call, this being high forenoon. One of the three was the first wife of the comical witch-doctor Zitende (heel-walker), who was looked upon as being partly demented. Her companion, a younger woman, was newly wedded and was very much dissatisfied at her young husband's behavior. His affections seemed to have suddenly cooled toward her, and because of this sudden lack of matrimonial ardor, the fat woman and her newly married friend had come to consult the small, dried-up-looking Mamoti, the witch-woman, who was feared by a few, loathed by many, and reluctantly tolerated by all as a necessary evil.

Mamoti listened to the complaint as put forward by Zitende's wife, with a word here and there by the plaintiff. As she listened she rocked herself to an fro and gave vent to her feelings with the usual monosyllable, repeated several times.

"M'm! M'm!"

"How soon after the wedding did your husband lose his liking for you?" Mamoti asked.

"Two moons after," was the wobegone answer.

"How many head of cattle has he?" Mamoti inquired.

"A great many," she was informed.

"What will you give to regain your husband's love?"

Mamoti waited eagerly for the reply, which was given promptly.

"All my cattle."

Mamoti looked up slyly and smiled, then questioned the young wife further.

*"Mamoti, the Witch-Woman," copyright, 1922, by Santie Sabalala.*



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"Where is your husband now?"

"Far away from here."

"Do you want me to bring him back and keep him here?" asked the witch.

"*Ewe! Ewe! Ewe!*" the woman assented eagerly.

"I want fifteen head of oxen and twenty goats *now*," remarked Mamoti.

"They are yours," said the young wife, her eyes shining and her face all smiles.

Mamoti wanted to know where the husband was just then, and was informed that he was in another kraal some two days' journey away. The witch promised to have him back in five days' time, and reminded the wife of the cattle and goats to be paid in advance. She was told that the whole herd would be driven into her *sibayi* (cattle-pen) by eventide of the next day.

The fat woman got to her feet ponderously; her tremendous stomach trembled like jelly as she began to laugh for no apparent reason whatsoever. The young wife beamed on Mamoti as she said—

"Remain in peace."

"May your path be smooth," Mamoti replied.

The two, the old fat *umfazi* and the young one walked away to their hut. Mamoti waited until they were out of sight, then slowly got to her feet and walked around the back of the hut. There she stood and watched the children run up to the safety spot of their game.

The hiders won, the seekers were "it" again. Loud shrieks of merriment and laughter filled the air, as the hiders scampered to their favorite hiding-places.

The witch-woman walked up to the edge of the pool that was between her and the children. She gazed deep and long at the dark, smooth water, then looked up and called to the children. They reluctantly left their play and came toward her.

"Taste the water," she commanded them.

They looked at each other uneasily and shuffled their feet.

"It is sweet," said the witch-woman.

She bent over and dipped the first finger of her right hand into the dark water of the pool, and then appeared to lick it. But really it was her second finger, which she had slyly substituted, she licked. The children followed her example, dipping their index fingers and tasting the water. A look of disgust spread over all the young faces as the taste of the stagnant water was manifested on their tongues. Their mouths bubbled over with foaming saliva and some of the children whimpered. A boy blurted out:

"Ugh! It tastes like the smell of a polecat."

Mamoti burst into a cackling laugh; the frightened children scattered and ran. Mamoti cackled louder, and walked toward the front of the hut. A tall man came around the front of the hut with a commanding stride. The witch-woman looked up and smiled.

"Your Highness Umsutu, son of the great Lobengula!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, yes," the prince bowed courteously. "Are you well, woman?" he asked.

"Yes, your Highness."

"What do you want, you woman?"

"I want a messenger to go a long way and bring here the husband of a young wife."

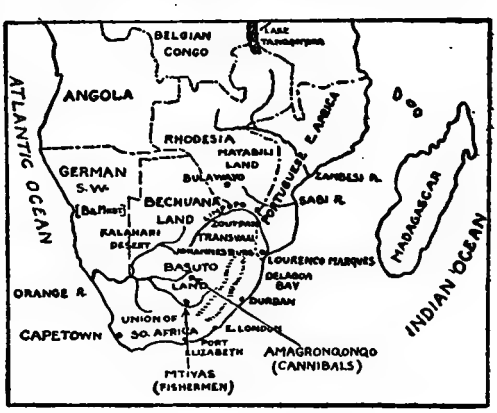
"I will send you one immediately," replied Umsutu, and with that strode off.

Mamoti smiled, and going into her hut made a fire. She crooned happily to herself as she thought over her plans.

A voice outside the hut made the knocking sound.

"Enter!" commanded Mamoti.

A wide-shouldered man stooped low and entered. He was told to come near the fire.




Mamoti asked him if he had been sent by his Highness, Prince Umsutu.

"Yes," the man replied.

Mamoti informed him that she wanted a messenger to go to a certain kraal two days' journey away and tell a certain man that his wife was unfaithful to him, and that if he would hasten back the witch-woman would show him how to get rid of the intruder.

The messenger was promised three head

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of cattle if he set out immediately for the kraal. The man's face beamed at the thought of the wealth that was to be his for such a small service. He got up and promised the woman that as soon as he had procured food and a robe he would start out on the designated journey.

Mamoti pointed over to a certain part of the hut, and told the man that everything he might need he would find in the bundle. The light of admiration shone in his face.

"My! You have brains!" he exclaimed.

Mamoti smiled as she watched him look over what she had prepared in the bundle—a *kaross* (hide robe), dried meat and large slabs of bread. The man rolled the food under his robe, tied it with a short thong that Mamoti handed him, thrust the stick through the thong, swung it with the bundle over his right shoulder, and walked out of the hut on a far journey.

AT HIGH noon next day fifteen head of cattle and twenty-five goats were driven in front of Mamoti's hut by two boys. Mamoti came out and looked the herd of cattle and goats over with a shrewd look on her face. In her right hand was a sharp knife. She walked over to a goat near her and called on the boys to hold it so that she could brand it with her own mark. This she did by cutting the tip of the right ear in the shape of a V and the other diagonally. This was done to all the goats. Then the cattle were treated in the same manner. But first they were tied down—the horns fastened with a rope to the trunk of a tree.

When all the cattle had been branded, Mamoti called the boys inside the hut and fed them on *amasi ne nkobe* (sour milk and boiled corn). They ate until they attained wonderful bay-windows and then walked out of the hut with groans and grunts of full stomachs. The woman drove the newly acquired cattle into the cattle-pen.

The sun blazed red and set.

Three days went by. On the evening of the fourth, as the shadows began to lengthen, two men strode into the hut; one was the messenger, and the other the young husband of Cukodi—the girl who had consulted the witch-woman.

"I have brought him back," remarked the wide-shouldered man.

"It is well. Come tomorrow and I will talk to you," said the woman.

The man hesitated a moment, then walked out.

"What is it with you? Talk quickly!" commanded the husband of Cukodi.

"Oh my, these men! Your wife has an affinity with an *mpundulu* (ghost)," said Mamoti.

"By the beard of the fathers!" thundered the young husband. "Where is it? How can I catch it? Tell me."

Mamoti smiled as she answered slowly—

"What will you give me if I tell you how to catch it?"

"Anything you want."

"I want seventeen head of cattle."

"There are plenty of girls," scoffed the husband of Cukodi.

"But the ghost can take them all," returned Mamoti.

"The cattle are yours!" snapped the man.

"You will do as I say?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"That is well. Tomorrow night, when the snores are loudest, you will leave your hut and come to the back of mine, on your hands and knees. Utter not a word and make not a sound, for the ghost will be seated with his back to the hut wall. You must jump on it and choke it, then throw it in the pool. Do not make a sound, or it will vanish."

The man listened with bulging eyes.

"Let the cattle be driven here in the morning," she continued.

"It shall be done," answered the warrior as he rose to his feet and swiftly left the hut.

Mamoti laughed softly to herself by the fire.

THE morning was awakened by the shouting of boys' voices, and the bleating of goats and the lowing of cattle. Above the noise rose a man's strong voice, as he indicated certain beasts which were to be separated from the herd—oxen here, some heifers there, until the total number driven to one side was seventeen.

Mamoti walked out toward the cattle-pens as the man was giving out these orders and asked him to mark the cattle for her. She handed him a sharp knife and told him her particular brand.

The man took the knife, and in a short while with the help of the boys had branded the seventeen head of cattle. He returned the knife to the waiting Mamoti and entered a certain hut to smoke a morning pipe.

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The witch-woman went into her hut. No sooner had she entered than the man who had acted as messenger also entered and demanded the three head of oxen she had promised him. When he was asked by Mamoti if he would like to get two more beside those he was promised, he assented quickly. Mamoti informed him that he must sit outside her hut, at the back and facing the pool, before the heaviest sleep of the night and not utter a word no matter what might happen.

The man demurred. Sitting up half of the night did not appeal to him. Mamoti offered an additional ox. He thought for a moment—accepted—and with that left the hut.

THE sun mounted high toward the heavens, reached its zenith and then slipped easily into the west—flooding the hills and valleys and the veld with a golden light as the boys rode the cattle home. Night stole quickly over the community.

From out of the twilight's silence, there rose a shout and laughter of boys playing the exciting game of *Oli*. This continued until the moon came up and then ceased. As the moon waned behind the high hills and the cold night dew blew down toward the valley, two figures, unknown to each other, stole out of their huts. One went forward on his hands and knees, the other walked swiftly, yet carefully, toward the back of the witch-woman's hut. Arriving there, the man settled himself to the ground reluctantly, breathing faster and faster.

There was a soft scratching noise, and a "thing" came on all fours toward the sitting figure. Ten feet away it stopped; nothing was heard except two sharp fluttering breaths.

The figure by the wall *queened* in its throat softly. The "four-footed one" crawled on, deliberately, until four feet away from the sitting figure.

The latter rose to his feet and sprang at the other's throat. They struggled fiercely and silently, working closer and closer to the edge of the pool. Once their bodies swayed near the brink, then a second time. One slipped and pulled the other to the ground. They rolled around, thrashing their legs about, sending showers of stones in all directions. Neither uttered a sound—one for fear his quarry would vanish in the air, the other because it might end his life. They rolled toward the pool, hung on the edge for the space of a heart-beat, and slowly toppled over the short mound into the dark waters of the pool.

There was a soft murmuring of water as small waves lapped the round edge. Bubbles rose from the center of the pool for a while, and then ceased. A wind blew out of a cloud into the night, chilling the air and scattering the bubbles as they skimmed over the placid, dark pool. Roosters crowed, a wakeful dog barked, contented cattle lowed, and the night wore on. The morning came.

MAMOTI woke up, wrapped herself in a hide robe, and walked out to the back of her hut. She smiled as she saw the marks of the night's struggle between a greedy man and a jealous husband. Mamoti picked up some small stones that were yellow and looked like grains of corn, then called up her brood of speckled chickens. They came to her on the run. She threw the corn-like stones, and the chickens ran thither and hither and picked up the stones, thinking they were grains of corn, and dropped them out of their mouths when they discovered their mistake. They stalked about, greedily picking up from time to time the same stones that they had had a few seconds before.

Mamoti cackled to herself as she observed how well the fowls were obliterating all traces of the struggle. Still laughing, she went toward the cattle-pen to count the new additions to her large herd of cattle.

When the sun was mid-morning high, Cukodi and the same fat woman of the former visit came to Mamoti's hut. The witch-woman was seated on the ground in front of her hut. The two women seated themselves in silence.

"What do you want?" Mamoti questioned the two.

Cukodi informed her that her husband had been to see her, but had not stayed long. Would Mamoti bring him back? The witch-woman giggled and remarked that she wanted more cattle if she were to bring him back.

"How many?"

The number was named.

"They are yours."

The fat woman got up and laughed for no apparent reason. Cukodi got up too. They both walked away, and Mamoti was

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left alone—smiling at her thoughts. After a while a shadow fell across her lap. She looked and saw Prince Umsutu.

"Your Highness! Your Highness! Son of the great King!" she said.

"Yes, yes. What is it you want, woman?"

"Nothing—not even a messenger," she replied.

The prince's brooding face lighted up in a smile as he passed on.

# JOHNNIE CHANTEY-MAN

## *by* Bill Adams

JOHNNIE PARROT, Johnnie Parrot, I'll not hear again
That old voice of yours a-ringin' down the windy rain,
When the ocean morning's a-clearin' an' the gale is past,
An' we're all a- "yo-heave-ho-in' " by the big main mast.

Johnnie Parrot, Johnnie Parrot, I can see 'em now—
Southeast trade wind seas a-breakin' high about the bow.
I can see the yellow oilskins of a shoutin' crew,
And the "roll the cotton, bullies, roll her," led by you.

I can see the skipper leanin' on the bridge's rail;
Hear him holler to the chief mate, "Crowd her—set all sail!"
I can feel the clipper leapin', as a colt untried,
Free to roam the rollin' pastures o' the open tide.

I see the China steward, the nigger cookie's face;
There's a skysail ship to loo'ard, an' we're goin' to race.
But a black squall comes a-hidin' all the sea an' sky,
An' white horses run a-ridin' with their manes blown high.

I can feel the packet tremble as she lifts her feet,
An' her dainty bows go dancin' down the sea's wide street;
I hear Johnnie Parrot singin', singin', "Roll an' go!"
An' the sons o' forty seaports roarin', "Yo-heave-ho!"

There are girls in forty seaports, an' they wait for you—
Wait for Johnnie Chantey-Man an' all his singin' crew;
But they'd better deck their tresses with bright ribbons gay,
An' forget those sailors singin' down the sea's cold way.

For the hungry seas are breakin' with an angry roar,
An' there's black squalls blowin' pipin' past a coral shore.
There's a clipper lyin' broken like a lily fair—
Lady, take some other token for your lovely hair!

'Tain't no use to love a sailor nor to wait the day
For your Johnnie's chanteys cheery ringin' down the bay!
'Tain't no use to listen, lady, for your seaman's love—
Johnnie's drowneded, lyin' drowneded, in a mermaid's cove.

"*Johnnie Chantey-Man*," *copyright*, 1922, *by Bill Adams.*

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# OVER THE RIM OF THE RIDGE

A FOUR-PART STORY

PART I

By Hugh Pendexter

*Author of "Pay Gravel," "War Wampum," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

### BILL MAYFIELD WANTS PIE

THE usual Placerville crowd, silver mad, awaited the coming of the east-bound coach from Sacramento; awaited the arrival of the west-bound coach from over the ridge, as the mighty crest of the Sierra Nevada was familiarly called; waited for a return of strength and a mending of feet to pursue the quest afoot. And there were those who simply loafed and harangued, as if good fortune might miraculously deluge a fellow if he but talked enough about the mountains of white metal. Many were drunk with fiery liquors, many were drunk with a wild optimism, and nearly all were vociferous and loud of voice.

The tenderfoot usually could be distinguished by the newness of his outfit and the jangling equipment strung around his waist, and his awkwardness in wearing knives and pistols. A few minutes of eavesdropping would reveal those who had been on the Comstock lode, for invariably a man who had visited the Nevada diggings would, within a few sentences, announce himself to be a one-ledge or a two-ledge enthusiast.

A mighty fratricidal struggle was convulsing the eastern part of the republic, but those whose thoughts were centered on Mount Davidson need not take a stand for Union or Confederacy. In the territory of Nevada on this crisp September day of 1861 North and South could claim about the same number of sympathizers, and sectional disputes frequently were punctuated by shots and thrusts of steel. Such partisanship was optional, however; a man had but to keep his mouth closed to conceal his bias. But in the matter of one-ledge or two-ledge theories only a bummer, or a Paiute Indian could hope to remain neutral. Men were urged for appointment to the federal bench of the territory, and were opposed, according to their lode leaning.

"Mott's no good! A one-ledge man ought never serve as a federal judge! Wait till Jim North gits in!" one raucous voice conquered the babel in Roney's Place to proclaim.

"Jim North, nor any other two-ledge man, oughter be allowed to serve as judge," retorted an equally penetrating voice.

And there followed a swirl of arms in one particular group, and peace was restored only after a good-natured young man insisted on every one stepping up to the long bar and "naming it."

This fragment of a dispute simply meant that Judge Gordon N. Mott's incumbency sent Ophir stock up and the Burning Moscow down, inasmuch as the latter company claimed the Ophir was working on a Moscow ledge and had initiated litigation to prove the point. Likewise, it was believed that the elevation of James W. North to the bench would reverse the market and send Burning Moscow up, with a corresponding loss to the Ophir investors.

Believers in the Flowery Diggings mines vied with each other in placing the Virginia and Gold Hill districts in second and third

*"Over the Rim of the Ridge," copyright, 1922, by Hugh Pendexter.*



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place, respectively, and evidenced their faith by wildly offering to trade "feet" in various lodes—fortunes absolutely guaranteed by word of mouth—and for a time their shouts smothered the talk at the bar as they frantically advertised for purchasers.

"Twenty feet of Lady Bryant! Who'll give seventy-five dollars a foot?" howled one.

"Ten feet of Mammoth! I'd never sell if——"

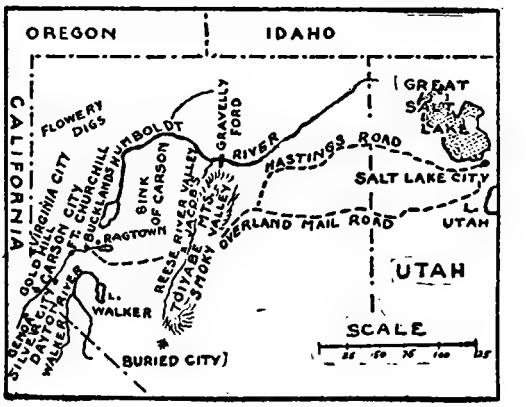
"The Morning Star has gone to two hundred in Frisco by this time. What am I offered for fifteen feet?"

And in turn the Gold Hill advocates secured the floor and boomed their wares and thrust samples of rock under many noses. One heavily be-whiskered fellow in torn blue shirt and broken boots, but rich with drink, sat on the floor in a corner and incessantly yelled—

"Billy Chollar! Who wants a hundred feet of Billy Chollar?"

And there were steady men from the Bay; men who pursed their lips shrewdly and clasped their hands behind their broadclothed backs, and segregated themselves in groups and conversed in low tones with winks and nods. They had swung no picks, nor had dug tunnels. Their hands were soft and their faces lacked the ingrained grime that comes from facing the desert winds. There were men from the Frisco kennels and dives; there were quite immaculately clad card men, wild-eyed brokers taking their profit whichever way the daily telegraph announced the market, whisky dealers, also certain of rich gains did they refrain from being their own best customers; and there were men of the legal profession, who had sniffed rich litigation afar, and who foresaw the many millions to be squandered in lawsuits.

Speculation and litigation; such was the history of Nevada's first two stages of developing the enormously rich lodes which were to permit the United States to resume specie payment. The Humboldt River, marking the path of the early explorers, then the California immigrants, was to show the way for steam across the Great Basin. Already the daily overland mail from the Missouri to San Francisco had shifted to this helpful stream from its former route across northern Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. And the telegraph line from Denver to Sacramento was completed while the crowd in Roney's Place quarreled, traded and drank.




Placerville was one of the most pleasingly situated towns in California, but few at Roney's had bothered to glimpse its charms. Hysteria ruled, and the world was created in six days solely to permit the stock-riggers of Montgomery Street to "kite" and depress values, to permit the big stockholders to "freeze out" the smaller fry.

Two men edged their way into Roney's, who differed from all others in that they seemed to take no interest in the scene. One took a position by the wall while the other worked forward to the end of the bar and endeavored to secure a bartender's attention. There was a striking similarity in their dusty, unkempt appearance, their nondescript clothing, battered boots, in their weathered faces and gray-streaked beards. Old Washoeites—those who had crossed over the ridge in fifty-nine, or sixty—knew them well. They were known as "Sorry" Kane and "Feeble" Thomas, and the expression of melancholy on each visage led strangers to assume they were brothers.

They were rather reticent men and not much given to taking their liquor in public places. At times they came over the mountains to Placerville, but few had seen them loitering in saloons at Virginia City, or Gold Hill; and yet they made their home near one of those mining-towns. But just where, or how, they lived no one had the curiosity to inquire. They were not inseparable, but it was Feeble Thomas who roamed farthest from the valley of the Carson.

Incoming immigrant wagons along the Humboldt River sometimes met Thomas

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and engaged him as guide. Kane's wanderings were confined almost entirely to the California side of the Sierra. In a land where men were strangers to each other and suspicious of each other, where few knew or cared what befell an immediate neighbor, there was none to notice the odd pair except as drunken hilarity called for derision.

The young man who had laughingly stopped a general fight by lavishly treating the house, glimpsed Thomas at the bar and waved a hand in greeting, a salutation that Thomas did not see. Getting a white apron's attention, the young man threw out a coin and directed:

"Serve the old fellow at the other end. He should have his pard along with him. Serve them both. They're probably broke."

"All right, Mister Washoe. But my partner is going to wait on him."

Then there entered a man whom no one derided, and whose advance on the bar found a clear path and two bartenders ready to wait on him. Only one man tarried—Feeble Thomas, and he because he had not seen the stranger's approach. Thomas was in the act of nervously displaying some sulfury, greasy-looking mineral specimens, preliminary to negotiating for two drinks, and a bartender was about to take a chance and permit him to carry the glasses where Kane was waiting, when the newcomer caught him by the shoulder and hurled him away from the bar. As he reeled against the wall some of the specimens dropped on the floor.

The onlookers laughed boisterously, and one or two called out—

"Hullo, Bill!"

Bill Mayfield, one of the most notorious desperadoes infesting the silver regions was in a bad humor, for his throat was parched. Lowering sullenly on the respectful crowd he ordered:

"My pertic'ler bottle of tarantula-juice. An' be quick!"

The bottle was quickly produced, and he spilled out a glassful, leaned against the bar and swept his whisky-shot gaze over the gathering. Deciding no enemies were in the room he relaxed his hostile pose a bit and turned his attention to the young man at the other end of the bar.

"Your name's Washoe?" he remarked.

The young man nodded, his gaze even and steady.

"Gamblin' man," approved Mayfield as he enviously appraised the well-fitting brown sack coat, the spotless linen and the patent-leather boots. "Seen you at Carson and Virginia a few times. Never got to talk with you. Only men fit to live in Carson valley is the gamblin' men." And he twisted his head and stared a challenge at the crowd.

"I've dealt a few cards," admitted Washoe. "More taken up with trading feet now."

Mayfield laughed hoarsely and remarked: "Glad you didn't say prospectin'. That would be a good one in them store-clothes."

The spectators laughed also; for many believed it was well to laugh at Bill's jokes without waiting to discover the point. Those who were ignorant of the man's history were being surreptitiously informed by the knowing.

"Some say he had thirteen murders against him when he came here," a man would murmur to a neighbor out the corner of his mouth.

Mayfield knew the word was being passed, and it tickled his vanity. He enjoyed catching a man's eye and staring at him till the curious gaze became abashed and was lowered. Washoe pushed back his slouch hat and smiled, but said nothing. He was waiting to see if Mayfield wished to pick a quarrel with him, and was well pleased when the ruffian turned again to the bottle and seemed to lose all interest in the company.

Having shown the crowd he had not been driven from the bar Washoe lounged to the door and into the sunshine. In passing Thomas and Kane he whispered:

"It's all paid for, boys. Mayfield won't bother you any after he's had a few more drinks."

Sorry Kane's eyes reflected fear of the man. Feeble Thomas, so called because he seldom showed any spirit, spat on the floor and muttered, "Curse his nasty hide!" Yet the two accepted Washoe's advice and began edging along the wall to attract the bartender's attention. Mayfield darted a glance at them and smiled grimly. Washoe reappeared in the door and called out to a bartender:

"Drinks are paid for. Two friends of mine, Tony."

Mayfield started to dart his malevolent gaze on the young man, then remembered

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his parched throat and turned back to the bottle and gave no more heed to the two eccentrics. Washoe leaned against the side of the door-jamb, and was interested to hear a voice explode:

"Good God! It'll run four thousand to the ton! Never see such stuff! Where did the old fool get it?"

"Shut up!" hissed another. "This is no place to talk."

But this small group could not hope to have exclusive possession of the rich secret. A dozen keen eyes had seen the specimens scattered on the floor. Some had managed to secure a piece, and there was a suppressed buzz of excitement throughout the room as it became known that Feeble Thomas had struck it rich. Washoe tucked the matter away in the back of his mind to consider later when he could find the two wanderers alone. Just now he was interested in watching the six-horse Concord coach swing into the town at a smashing pace. Always a lover of horseflesh he watched the driver tool the lumbering vehicle to a halt before Roney's, and nodded his head in approval.

THE driver, quite an exquisite creature in his light hat, linen duster, lemon-colored gloves and nugget scarf pin, swung down from the box and pulled out his gold chronometer to time the hostlers as they came up with fresh animals. The Wells-Fargo guard ceased nursing his shotgun and tossed a coin to a boy, who appeared from nowhere to do reverence to Driver Pete's technique. The boy caught the coin and evidenced a thorough knowledge of the guard's desire by rushing into the barroom and, unintimidated by Mayfield, shrilly demanding instant service. He returned to the coach with two glasses of whisky. The guard tossed his off at a gulp, the driver drank more leisurely.

The boy took the glasses and was backing away so as to lose not a move made by his idols when a small face appeared at the coach door. A ragged slouch hat and a man's coat concealed all but the gray eyes and a freckled nose and the ends of several gold-colored curls. The boy halted his retreat to stare at the small traveler. The young person nodded toward the succession of heights leading up to the sky and the crest of the Sierra Nevada, and inquired—

"It's a right smart way up there to the top, boy?"

The boy gaped, then grinned widely and replied—

"Yah! Git your hair cut!"

Fire blazed in the gray eyes.

"If I come out there I'll chaw you up and lay you out colder'n a wedge!"

"Yah! Pike County!" derisively howled the boy, dropping the heavy glasses and skipping about in a pantomime of pugilistic defiance, copied from a barroom print of Mr. Tom Sayers and Mr. John C. Heenan about to mingle in combat. "Git your hair cut! Mama's pet! Curls! curls!"

Washoe, amused at the scene, suddenly smoothed out his handsome face and caught the boy by the ear and gravely rebuked him:

"Son, where's your manners? Is that the way to welcome a lady to immortal Placerville?"

"Lady?" gasped the boy, forgetting to struggle. "I reckoned she was some mama's pet! I ain't got any call to sass a gal."

And ducking bashfully at the irate passenger he dropped the glasses inside his shirt and retreated to the barroom in a series of artistically executed cart-wheels.

Advancing to the coach door Washoe removed his hat, bowed low, and regretfully said:

"The young man did not understand, Miss. Er—it is miss, and not missis?"

"Lor! I ain't married!" exclaimed the girl, staring round-eyed at the dapper figure. Then with a reminiscent flash of anger: "But that young weasel's powerful lucky! 'Nother minute and I'd been outside there and clawing him something han'some."

"He is sorry. He did not understand. Far be it from Placerville to offend a lady!"

The girl dismissed the gamin and again carefully surveyed the slim figure from brown hair to boots. Washoe waited, with a hint of a smile twitching his thin lips. His patent-leather foot-gear seemed to fascinate the gray eyes. But when she spoke it was to remark—

"You don't seem to be toting much hardware, Stranger."

"Harmless people don't need to carry guns," he told her.

The driver snorted loudly, replaced his watch, clambered to the box, and gruffly inquired—

"Bound over the ridge, Washoe?"

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"Yes; I'm going back with you, Peter. Mare went lame. Had to leave her to be sent over." With another low bow to the girl he pulled himself up beside the driver, taking the favored seat as though it had been reserved for him.

The driver bawled a warning and waited a few moments for any belated passengers to arrive, then gathered up the reins and haughtily motioned the hostlers to stand clear of the leaders, released the brake, and remarked—

"With them clothes, Washoe, you oughter be a member of the legislater when she meets next month at Carson."

"If clothes could to it, I'd be there, Pete." The coach got under way, and Washoe mildly suggested: "Better hold them for a bit. Fellow coming on the run."

Without deigning to glance back, Peter coldly replied:

"When I give my last hoot and pick up the ribbons this outfit don't wait for nobody. Wouldn't wait for my own grandfather." And he swung the long lash and exploded the tip over the heads of the leaders.

"Folks ought to be on time," agreed Washoe. "But Bill's sometimes fussy."

"Bill be ——!" snorted the driver.

"I'll play it with a copper that Bill Mayfield will be," heartily retorted Washoe.

"Whoa!" The leaders were pulled up, the brakes groaned, and the coach came to a standstill. "Why in tophet didn't you say it was Bill Mayfield?" growled Peter as he cast an uneasy glance behind him.

"I was saying it was Bill. Thought you understood. I was admiring you for running away from him."

"I've got to have a bigger start then this afore I do any running away from Bill Mayfield," muttered the driver.

Mayfield was standing in the road, his revolver half-drawn, debating whether to send a fusillade of lead at the coach and probably murder some of the passengers, and most certainly receive a reply from the express-messenger's shot-gun, or save his lead until he next met the driver. As the coach halted he walked to it with elaborate leisure.

"What ye mean by drivin' off an' leavin' me?" he demanded.

"Never see you, Bill, till Washoe told me. Hop aboard."

The desperado, sleepy from his hurried libations and anxious to get back to his stamping grounds along the Carson River, tucked the grievance against the driver in a corner of his vicious mind and clambered into the coach.

"If Bill gits playful he'll scare the liver out of the passengers," nervously chuckled Peter as the coach swung up the graded road.

"What about that girl?"

"He won't skeer her much," assured Peter. "She's mighty pert. Reg'lar sass-box. She reckoned I tossed her bundle inside a leetle careless, an' she combed me down most pertic'ler. Reg'lar wild-cat, I opine."

"Traveling alone, eh?"

"Alone? No. She's got a rifle. One that old Dan'l Boone might 'a' toted. But she don't need any rifle. Her tongue would make a bowie-knife run. It'll be weeks afore I forgit some of the things she said about my looks. I'd given a month's pay if she'd been a man." And as he refreshed his recollections he groaned.

"No month's pay to have her Bill Mayfield," amended Washoe.

"And *not* Bill Mayfield," firmly replied the driver. Then in a hoarse, confidential voice: "Hope to —— Bill goes to sleep an' don't cut up any. The guard will shoot if he does, an' Bill will shoot, an' I'm paid to drive six hosses—an' nothin' else."

"He won't make any trouble," comforted Washoe, cutting the end from a fifty-cent cigar and sticking it in the driver's mouth. Then he cupped his hands and held a light and proceeded to furnish himself with a smoke. "It's the west-bound coaches that interest Bill and his friends."

"They're int'rested where money's to be found," mumbled Peter. "They know these incoming Frisco sharps are pretty well loaded with cash. It's my idee that Bill's been over this side of the ridge to look up prospects. But I ain't got any quarrel with any of that breed. I told the super'tendent I was neutral with them cusses, just as I am in this yere war they're fightin' back East. My job's to git my hosses an' the coach through. Th' guard's job is to git the 'spress through. Roundin' up road-agents an' bullies is th' United States' business an' th' Confed'rate States' business. Old Pete is as neutral as a clump of sage-brush, or a patch of greasewood."

Washoe began whistling "Dixie." The

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driver grinned and shifted his cigar to a corner of his capacious mouth to remark—

"Reckon Old Abe won't be pres'dent of th' whole shootin'-match much longer."

"The war's already won by the South," Washoe declared.

The ascent to Strawberry Flat was gradual and continuous. On the right the passengers could look down on a fork of the American, plunging and fretting its way through the winding cañon. Bordering the road and obscuring the sky were the tall pines, much larger of growth than those on the east slope of the Sierra. When Washoe passed over the road in the spring of the preceding year it was almost impassable with mud-holes and the wreckage of all sorts of vehicles. Long pack-trains, moving in both directions, endangered life by their wild stampedes. At that time every ravine and hollow held a tent or brush shack to afford sleeping accommodations for weary wayfarers making the trip afoot; and liquor bars had been just as plenty although many were lacking roofs.

And there was the cruel pinch of hunger east of the mountains during that first mad rush. The scanty hay crop had sold for sixty cents a pound, and horses and cattle had perished by many hundreds; human beings all but starved, although nowhere, going or coming, was there any need of a man going without a drink or a cigar. Each time the sugar and flour were exhausted on the long slope of Mount Davidson it was optimistically announced that the whisky would "last another week or two." And there had been times when a famished settlement whooped joyously and ran to meet an incoming train only to find the mules loaded with rum, gin, whisky and wine.

"Year ago last March I gave a gold dollar at the Lake House for a small hunk of bread and a half a cup of tea—very weak tea," Washoe reflectively observed.

"Mighty poor bread at that, I reckon."

"I don't know. Probably. Gave it to my mare. She didn't want the tea. Poor girl! Had to shoot her after I'd fed her all the bread to be found where Virginia now stands. A mountain of silver and not enough grub to keep the little lady alive. I'll always hate the place for that."

"Sho! Now tell! Still ye stick there pretty close."

"Yes; I'm sticking there."

The conversation was not continued. Peter feared he had been indiscreet. A driver for the overland mail was a high and haughty creature, yet he was not above the unwritten law against being "nosey."

NIGHT came on and the moaning of the wind through the giant pines became more obtrusive. At last the coach rattled over a bridge and into view of several camp-fires and lights streaming from the windows of a large log house. The house still maintained its reputation as being the best stopping-place between Placerville and the first settlements beyond the mountains. It was eight miles from the crest of the mighty ridge, and a most welcome place of refreshment for the tides of humanity surging east and west.

The fires marked the camping-places of pack-trains and immigrant wagons. Some of the latter were filled with furniture painfully carted from the Mississippi states. Around these were grouped the families of the owners. These had overcome insurmountable obstacles over the southern route to California and were now doubling back to join the silver-mad hordes for the Washoe diggings, as they were persistently called, although there were no mines in the Washoe valley.

They had conquered the thirst of the desert and had "stood off" the Indians, and now were only concerned with minor problems and had washed the momentous difficulties and dangers from their minds. Vaqueros were fluently cursing their mules as they had in Fifty-nine. Pioneer women, dressed as men, were dismounting from burros. Men of some elegance in dress were solicitous of their blooded horses. Several of these recognized Washoe and nodded curtly, and wondered what the chances were for a night of gaming; for when tenderfeet were not to be had for a plucking they turned cannibal and devoured each other. Towering above the animated scene were the pines, sighing as they had these many centuries, entirely occupied with some ancient pathos and as thoroughly unconcerned about the insects shouting and cursing, laughing and singing around the camp-fires, or filling the stout log house with their clamor.

"All out who want to grub!" shouted the driver as he descended from the box and hurried to the house.

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With a feline care for neatness Washoe smoothed out his brown locks, straightened his coat and dusted his boots with a white handkerchief. He was thus occupied when Bill Mayfield erupted from the coach, his eyes blinking with unfinished sleep, his throat calling for whisky. After him came the other passengers, all men; and, lastly, the small person who had offered to "chaw" up the Placerville gamin. She halted and stared curiously at Washoe.

The light from the camp-fires and streaming from the windows threw him into bold relief. But it was the application of the snowy handkerchief to the shiny boots that held the girl's attention. She pulled aside the skirts of the coat covering her homespun gown and surveyed her cowhide boots, sadly worn and much too large for her, and her eyes grew big with approval of the young man's pleasing appearance. She gave a little sigh as she summed up the contrast between his presentment and hers, and clamped the slouch hat like a hood over her mass of curls.

Washoe replaced his handkerchief and stared at her curiously. In her nondescript garments she presented a grotesque figure, and yet there was no concealing the quaint charm of the small face. The Placerville boy was excusable in accepting her as one of his sex, Washoe first decided; then quickly reversed his opinion and found no suggestion of the masculine in the wide gray eyes. Ordinarily a girl in a strange and rough environment would have appealed to his strength because of her helplessness. He found nothing in her bearing, however, to suggest she even felt abashed. Her gaze was cool and steady and calculating as she swiftly glanced over the different bits of the lively scene. There was composure and self-dependence in her manner of stretching her slight form and raising and working her arms. She displayed no symptoms of timidity; she was interested in all she beheld. When she reached inside the coach and fished out a squirrel-rifle and tucked it under her arm the act was thoroughly business-like. She started toward the house, and Washoe stepped to her side, bared his head and said:

"Might as well take your time, miss. Barroom's packed till the walls bulge. They've set up the table in the dining-room half a dozen times already."

She halted and studied him thoughtfully, then finally remarked—

"You seem to know a heap about what's been going on here while you was roosting on the top of the coach, Mister."

Pleased with the youth of her and amused at her assurance Washoe with a laugh explained:

"I'm back and forth quite a bit. It's an old story to me. I know how things are along the line. There'll be plenty to eat and time to eat it. Perhaps we can get in at the back door."

"I feel like pecking at victuals," she gravely told him. "But I ain't mortal hungry. I fetched along a pone or two. You're one of those gambling men?"

Washoe's morals were those of the times and the country. Yet he sensed disapproval in her query, and his face grew warm as he admitted:

"I've dealt a few cards. It's a common amusement out here. But for real work I trade feet."

She darted a puzzled glance at his neatly shod extremities and demanded:

"What's the matter with your trotters? Are you trying to be comical?"

"Trading mining-stock. We call it 'feet.' You seem rather young to be traveling alone."

"When I'm toting this rifle I'm as old as my grandpap and as strong as a painter," she calmly retorted.

Washoe threw back his head and laughed in huge delight. For a few seconds an angry blaze flickered in her gray eyes, but already she had approved of his appearance, and her lips parted over perfect teeth, and she knew she liked him in a wary sort of a way.

"Now if you wish we'll try the kitchen door," he said. "I believe we can get ahead of some of the crowd. You can leave the rifle in the kitchen——"

"I'll leave my rifle right with Matilda Jaimson," she quickly cut in.

"Matilda Jaimson?" he repeated, glancing about for a female adjunct.

"Me," she crisply explained.

"Oh! By all means keep the gun at hand, Miss Matilda, if you are afraid."

"Nary a bit afraid. Just a trifle careful about my belongings. You must have been very neighborly here to use the cook-house door."

"I'm quite a regular customer. They

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know me. I'm called 'Washoe.' They named me that as I was among the first to cross the ridge when silver was found on the Comstock lode. I have another name, but none would know me by it. So I let it go at Washoe."

"I ain't asked any questions," she coldly reminded him. "We'll try that back door if you'll lead the way."

Washoe skirted the crowd before the front entrance and conducted her to a rear door. He stepped aside to allow her to precede him, and immediately an harassed-looking man, busy with several large skillets, let out a yell and grabbed up a slab of fat pine. Before he could hurl it to discourage the intrusion Washoe intervened to shield the girl and warned:

"Be careful of the lady, Joe. We're just sneaking in ahead of some of the redshirts."

"Didn't see you, Washoe," growled Joe, turning back to his several tasks. "Thought some immigrant's brat was trying to sneak a chunk of meat. They pester the life out of me. What I'd like to know is how many of them cattle out front we've got to feed. I've been cooking for eight hours with only time to take a snort or two of rum for nourishment. If old Lincoln's Yanks could charge as brisk as the folks out front is charging that dining-room door the Yanks would be going ahead 'stead of always falling back; and there wouldn't be anything left south of Maryland."

Miss Matilda slipped through the door and stared belligerently at the worried cook, and sharply warned—

"You keep your Johnny Reb tongue in your head, or some day you'll be biting it off!"

The cook dropped a skillet and gawped in amazement and for the first time saw her clearly. She met his blank gaze squarely and snapped:

"I'm Union. My pap's Union to the hub. We don't have no truck with secesh."

"Gawdfrymighty!" muttered the cook, rubbing his red eyes. Then with a flash of nervous anger he barked—

"Washoe, you take that young feller out of here aforen I boil over!"

Miss Matilda would have lingered to give battle, but Washoe caught her arm and propelled her, shrilly protesting, into the dining-room.

In those first days of the war it did look as though the Stars and Stripes might never again wave over the Southland. The battle at the small stream known as Bull Run was an old story in California and the new territory of Nevada; likewise the defeat of the Union forces at Carthage and Wilson's Creek. The news had just been received over the Denver-Sacramento wire that Price had taken Lexington and had captured a large number of Union soldiers. These initial victories, later to be classed as preliminary skirmishes, loomed large on the coast and furnished gloomy thinking for Union men.

The girl continued protesting, and repeating her sentiments, after Washoe got her inside the door. Perhaps it was fortunate for her escort that the mighty clamor of the diners, about to give way for a new influx, smothered her ardent speech. Washoe sighed in relief as with a crashing of chairs and a thunderous stamping of feet the mob arose and made for the door, where it must do battle with another mob before it could penetrate to the barroom. Securing two overturned chairs at the end of the long table Washoe induced his angry young charge to be seated. Until the table was "set up" again the two would have the room to themselves; for the outer door was kept locked while the weary waiters assailed the wreckage, swept the boards clean, and with a deafening clatter dealt fresh plates and tableware and made ready for the next onslaught.

"You mentioned your father? Where is he?" asked Washoe, fairly shouting to make himself heard.

For the second time he was privileged to see her smile, and the effect was superbly pleasing.

"Pap's sot in his ways," she drawled. "We had a smart bit of trouble in gitting our traps out here. The Injuns was o'nary and tried to capture our wagon. We lost all our cows and four mules before we fetched Salt Lake City. We had trouble there along of some of them wanting me to join their church." And she glanced down, and her small face flushed violently.

"So the whole trip riled pap up quite tolerable. Didn't seem as if we'd ever fetch Californy. It was one mess of trouble after another. But what riled pap the most was when we struck a toll-ferry, bridge, or gate. He louded up every time we had to pay toll and reckoned this is a



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free country and that no human critter has a right to make another human critter pay for going over a road or crossing a crick. When we at last got to Uncle Allen's house in Sacramento pap told all our connection and the neighbors that he'd be —— before he'd pay another cent toll to anything that walks on his hind-legs. That's like pap. He's slow to make up his mind, but when he does there ain't any stirring him."

"A very determined man," remarked Washoe, his face holding its puzzled expression.

The girl smiled at some pleasing thought, played with a heavy knife a waiter had flung before her, and lazily continued:

"After we'd got rested a bit and was ready to start over this way, pap 'lowed he'd keep his word about not paying any more toll. Uncle Allen tried to talk him out of it, and let on he'd be shot, or knifed, if he tried to bust through without paying. Pap cracked his heels together and 'lowed he'd try it anyway. But when he understood that the law-makers let folks set up toll-gates and ferries he simmered down a lot. He's always keen for the law, but he was sot as ever. So he started with the wagon on ahead and left me to come along with Uncle Allen once he got into the silver country. Uncle Allen and me was to look for him in Carson City about this time."

"Naturally he'll be longer with a wagon than if he made it by the overland stage—" began Washoe.

With another display of mirth the girl triumphantly interrupted:

"He planned to drive *around* all the rivers that have toll ferries or bridges. And he's going to quit the roads and drive *around* the toll-gates. His last words to me was: 'I'm biding by the law. If the law says they can take toll I won't buck against that law. But I'll dive, walk, or crawl around their old rivers before I pay another dollar.' And that's why he had to start out ahead and why it's taking him so long."

Washoe joined in her mirth, and assured her:

"He won't have much of a job in Nevada. Rivers all get tired and quit flowing and disappear in sinks." Then he grew sober and with a sideling glance inquired, "But where is your Uncle Allen?"

"Oh, he has to do his lazing 'round where the boat makes its landing, and the day before we was to start he had his legs hanging down where they didn't ought to be and got one crunched. So I come on alone."

"I see," mumbled Washoe. "And you're not afraid?"

She eyed him wonderingly; then gently explained, as one might try to teach the obvious to a dull child:

"I've told you pap and me had trouble with Injuns. Then there was a smart sprinkle of trouble in Salt Lake. After all that I don't go to look for anything to be afraid of out here. If anyone goes to make trouble for me I'll bust a cap on him." And she glanced down at the old rifle on the floor beside her chair.

"But you're not sure your father is at Carson City. Your uncle should have telegraphed him to find out if he was there."

Again the wonderful illumination of the small face, prompted by her sense of humor. With a throaty chuckle she explained:

"It wouldn't done any good. Pap doesn't believe in telegraphs. He says you can't send a writing by a piece of wire. If they gave him a telegraph writing from Uncle Allen or me he'd be likely to think some one was trying to play a joke on him, and he'd bust some one over the head. And he'd never send any word back."

Their talk was interrupted by the door swinging violently open. A mob of men hurled themselves upon the long table. Some vaulted over the backs of chairs. Others were seized and hurled aside just as they were about to seat themselves. One man leaped upon the table, intending to traverse it until he found a vacant chair, and was promptly knocked to the floor by a waiter. Almost immediately every seat was filled, and the table rocked and groaned until even Washoe feared the legs would collapse. The defeated profanely retired to lead the next rush. There arose a chorus of "Waiter! Waiter!" Raucous voices bawled for "pork 'n' beans." Like a medley of war-cries were added, "Ham 'n eggs!" "Coffee! Coffee!" "Beefsteak 'n sassage 'n', quick!"

Washoe kept silent until a flush-faced, wild-eyed waiter staggered in from the kitchen; then he reached out and halted the man. The glare died out of the worried eyes and with a semblance of a grin the waiter panted—

"Take what you want, Washoe, but be quick!"

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Washoe promptly relieved him of the bulk of his load.

"Everybody seems to be mortal hungry," cried the girl.

Washoe served her with steak and eggs and coffee and fell to eating. Talk was too much of an exertion. The girl appeared to enjoy the confusion amazingly. She threw back her head and laughed delightedly when a man reared violently as a cup of coffee was spilled down his neck. The din of clattering dishes and bawling voices lasted for half an hour and then subsided enough for fragments of conversation to be audible. Half-way down the table a violent argument started between a one-ledge man and a two-ledge believer. Just as Miss Matilda was beginning to pick up the thread of the dispute a Northerner and a Southerner began a quarrel. What had been a clamor concerning food and service was renewed for and against the one-ledge theory, the Union and Secession.

"Ophir's squatting on the Burning Moscow ledge. She's got to git off!"

"Old Price can't ever hold Lexington!"

"Burning Moscow won't be worth a cent a foot a year from now!"

"Governor Jackson will hold Missouri for the Confed'racy till —— freezes!"

"You're a liar!" shrieked Miss Matilda.

"For Heaven's sake, keep still," begged Washoe.

"The United States don't have to keep still for nobody, nowhere," she hotly replied.

Washoe was saved a possible fight because of the general din, and the inability of anyone overhearing the girl to determine to just what disputant her remark was addressed. They were finishing the meal when a chunk of bread bounced against the girl's empty coffee-cup and knocked it over. Washoe leaned forward to discover the offender. Bill Mayfield was stretching his neck over the table and staring wrathfully toward the head. Catching Washoe's eye he bellowed—

"Send that piece of pie down here!" He referred to a cut of mince-pie awaiting Miss Matilda's attention.

When the desperado spoke the room quieted down. Mayfield was a man with a malignant background. Homicides and lesser sins were grouped thickly behind him. Old-timers whispered bits of his history to newcomers. Washoe was handicapped for language because of the girl's presence. He realized he could not appear at his masculine best, but he retorted:

"Only a skunk would throw anything at a young lady. There's no pie up here for you, Mayfield. But there's a lunch of lead if you don't mend your manners."

The men seated between Mayfield and the head of the table vacated their chairs by the simple expedient of tipping over backwards and then crawling to one side. Mayfield picked up his knife and fork and resumed eating. Washoe turned to address the girl, thinking the affair had ended so far as the dining-room was concerned.

Mayfield roared—

"Now I'll have that hunk o' pie, I reckon."

Washoe jerked his head about and stared into the muzzle of the desperado's notched hand-gun. Keeping his hands well above the table Washoe politely replied—

"When you want it that much you want it more than we do." And he reached for the plate.

But the girl leaned to one side, as if fearing a bullet, and snatched up her rifle, executing the maneuver with great dexterity and rapidity. And she warned:

"You just put up that shooting-iron, mister. And clear out. Mizzle! There ain't any pie for you tonight. Git!"

Washoe remained a statue in rigidity, his hands resting on the plate. Mayfield glanced from him to the muzzle of the rifle, his eyes glowing with helpless rage. Even he dared not dispute the rifle with his revolver. And the long gun was held as steadily as a rock, and the gray eye blazing down the barrel was all impelling.

"Mizzle!" snapped the girl. "One, two——"

The desperado hastily rose and thrust his revolver into his belt and stalked from the room, his head swinging from side to side to catch any expression of amusement.

After he had disappeared through the door and the silence continued the girl shrilly remarked:

"Good riddance. Probably you'll have to meet up with him outside if he feels quarrelsome."

"Probably," agreed Washoe as he slipped a derringer from the pocket of his coat into the small holster inside his left sleeve.

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## CHAPTER II

### WHEN KELL HAWKINS DEALT

MISS MATILDA finished her pie, leaned back and said:

"I know what trouble is. Pap and me had real trouble coming out here. Now how about trouble for you here tonight Mister Washoe?"

"No trouble for me," he lightly assured her.

"I hope not." And the small face grew very sober. "Keep your gun handy. Pap always says never to wait for a man to get started, but to watch his eye and dig in when you 'low he's planning to start."

"Your father is ripe with experience and heavy with wisdom," declared Washoe. "I'll watch that man's eye. Now you go out the main door and make for the coach. I'll slip out the back way so if Mr. Mayfield is waiting for me he won't catch me off my guard."

Without a word the girl took her rifle and passed out the regular exit. Washoe paid a waiter for the two meals and retreated through the kitchen. Once outside he gained a barroom window and by concentrating his gaze on those closest to the bar soon located Mayfield. Back near the immigrants' camp-fires the driver was hoarsely calling for the passengers to be stirring. Washoe ran to him and requested:

"Wait a minute for me, Pete. Bill Mayfield may want a word with me."

"I'll wait a week if you'll do for him," whispered the driver.

Washoe glanced about, but failed to locate the girl. Already many of the men who were to stop all night had gone up-stairs to the one long room filled with narrow bunks, and the last relay of the hungry were in the dining-room. The barroom was quite free of its former crowd. Miss Matilda stood just outside the front door, a grotesque little figure in her man's coat and boots and rough hat. She was nursing the squirrel-rifle in both hands, ready for immediate action, when Washoe came upon her.

"I was afraid something had happened to you," she sighed. "That driver has been threatening to quit, but I couldn't go without knowing you was all right. The pie-man ain't stirred from his licker. You're going on?"

"In just a minute. The driver will wait for me. Go and get comfortably settled. I must get some cigars."

"If he'll wait for you, he'll wait for me," she replied. "I'll stick along here by the door while you git the seegars."

He preferred that she return to the waiting coach, but there was no time to argue with her, and evidently she was self-willed enough to do as she chose. Entering by the front door and turning into the barroom Washoe briskly advanced toward Mayfield, his hands loosely clasping the lapels of his coat. Mayfield was standing with his back to the bar, his left hand resting on a bottle, his right hand hanging alongside his hip. He watched Washoe sharply. Without appearing to notice him Washoe leaned his left elbow on the bar and ordered half a dozen cigars.

He was standing on Mayfield's right. The latter's left hand tilted the bottle and filled the glass and without turning his head he brought the brimming glass around and tossed it off. Encountering Washoe's watchful gaze he snarled:

"Carryin' it in your sleeve, huh? A —— gambler's trick!"

"It's a good trick," said Washoe, pocketing his cigars with his left hand. "Especially when you don't know which sleeve has the joker."

"Some day you'll find it ain't such a —— of a trick after all." And Mayfield drew up his right leg as if to brace his heel against the front of the bar.

"Carrying it in your boot, huh?" laughed Washoe. "Thinking I'll be watching the one on your hip. Real bad-man's trick."

"Mebbe I carry 'em all over me."

Washoe lighted a cigar, using his left hand and never shifting his gaze from the desperado's bearded face.

"Going over the ridge tonight?" he softly inquired.

"What's that to you?"

"Nothing, except you've had your turn riding inside and need the air. So you'll ride outside if you go on tonight."

"Like —— I will."

"That depends on how fast Pete puts the nags along. You're drunk and no decent company for a young girl."

"But Washoe, gambler an' dealer in granite mining claims, is bully comp'ny, huh?" snorted Mayfield, shifting his position a trifle.

"Make another move and I'll bore you,

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you skunk," softly promised Washoe. And his right hand had plucked the double-barreled derringer, short of barrel but murderous of bore, from the left sleeve holster; and the weapon, deadly at close range, was menacing the center of Mayfield's soiled shirt bosom.

"You needn't dig up no guns," hoarsely assured Mayfield, straightening out his leg and lifting his right hand to the top of the bar. "I never aimed to make any trouble up here. Some time. Somewhere else—we'll see."

Washoe smiled grimly and taunted:

"You figured it was in my right sleeve, eh? You mean you don't want any trouble with me when I'm looking, or when you haven't your gang at your back. You'd better be on the safe side and fetch along a whole parcel of them. And next time we meet I'll be carrying something besides derrings. I've decided you're too drunk to travel even on the outside tonight. And don't take your hand off the bar while I'm inside."

Mayfield made no response, but his savage eyes glittered wickedly. He believed it would be difficult for Washoe to withdraw from the room without giving him a chance to draw a gun. With the length of the room between them the derringer would not be as deadly as the big revolver in his right bootleg, or the one on his hip. Washoe, too, realized his retreat must be conducted carefully, or else he would be forced to fight with the big guns giving his opponent much of the advantage. He displayed none of his perturbation, however, as he began to back away from the bar. Mayfield watched him wolfishly, his muscles tightening as he prepared to duck and go for one of his guns. Then a man, who had appeared to be asleep in a corner, with his head buried on his arms and his arms resting on a small table, sat erect and dropped a Colt's navy revolver on the table and called out:

"It's all right, Washoe. Don't be afraid to show your back."

"John Blackburn!" exclaimed Washoe; and he felt greatly relieved. For Deputy Marshal Blackburn was a host for one to have behind him. Already he had proved his mettle to Mayfield, for he had killed one of the latter's men at Carson City in the fall of fifty-nine when the gang was trying to loot a store. He had come to Nevada in the first days of the silver discoveries, having before that resided at Dutch Flat on the west side of the mountains. He knew bad-men and their ways and was always unafraid.

"John, that's kindly of you," said Washoe. "I won't forget it."

Blackburn leaned back and yawned, stretching his arms until his hands were far from the gun on the table, and smiled at Mayfield and informed Washoe:

"No need of my chipping in. Thought I would to save some window glass."

Both Mayfield and Washoe glanced toward the window nearest the bar and beheld a small face fringed with curls and surmounted by a ragged slouch hat. The girl was holding a bead on Mayfield, and the scoundrel shuddered as he realized the narrowness of his escape. With a snarl he turned his back on the two men and filled his glass and remarked over his shoulder:

"'Pears to take quite a lot of people to git this young man out of the room alive. As for you, Blackburn, some day you'll cut across my trail the last time."

"You mean I'll cut in so as to be ahead of you, Bill. And when I'm not looking you'll earn another notch for your guns. Now here is a good place to settle things. Washoe isn't in this. The girl has taken her rifle from the window. See! I get up and walk about the table, even move away from it for several feet. What better chance could you ask for, Bill?"

But Mayfield, watching him in the mirror, was not to be tempted. The marshal stepped several feet from the gun on the table, but the desperado suspected there was a second gun very close to the officer's hand. Without turning his head Mayfield said:

"I ain't looking for no fight up here. You don't have to keep watch on me 'less you're bound to have trouble."

Blackburn thrust his gun in his belt and returned Washoe's salute as the atter stepped through the door. The girl was waiting to meet him, and he said:

"Thanks, Miss Matilda. You're a real friend. Get into the coach now. Mayfield isn't going with us."

She settled herself against the bundle containing her personal effects. Washoe swung up beside the driver and informed him:

"You can let them out. Mayfield stays here tonight. He hasn't any of his gang with him and had no fight for me. John

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Blackburn chipped in when I was leaving and tried to get him to draw, but Bill remembers the man he lost by Blackburn's gun at Carson City two years ago."

"He'll git John yit," muttered the driver as with a vicious crack of his whip he sent his horses into the eight-mile grade to the summit. "If John didn't have so much sand he'd live longer. But being 'fraid of nothing he won't be careful. They'll jump him some day when he isn't looking. Wish Bill Mayfield was dead."

Although urged along smartly the horses were allowed to pick their way as the darkness made impossible any guidance by the driver. To an outside passenger making a night trip for the first time the experience would be weird to the point of madness—six fresh horses plunging into a black wall with a madman of a driver cracking his whip and holding them to their gait. Washoe minded it none for he knew the intelligent animals would keep the road. It might be possible that, in taking a bend, not enough allowance would be made for the coach, in which case the heavy vehicle might swish its hind wheels over the edge of a steep descent and wreck the whole outfit. But seasoned Sierra coach travelers were philosophers; the coach would, or would not, arrive.

TWO miles out from Strawberry the driver reined in, and dismounted to examine a bridge. Washoe followed him and thrust his head into the coach. The several passengers, including the girl, were sleeping soundly. Washoe borrowed a blanket from the guard and flung it over Miss Matilda. Returning to his seat he smoked continuously until the summit was reached. Had it been daylight he could have looked down into Lake Valley and glimpsed the twenty-mile stretch of Lake Tahoe, perched on the rim of the Great Basin. He remained awake for the three-mile descent to the valley, where he, the driver and the guard obtained hot coffee from a large frame shack that was packed full of snoring travelers. Before the mile-wide valley had been crossed and the next up-grade assailed, Washoe was asleep. The swaying coach dipped down the more gradual eastern slope and traveled wildly through the darkness. Washoe awoke when the east showed red.

"I'll shift inside, Pete," he decided as the coach entered the sands of the Carson Valley.

The tired driver grinned as he hauled up and observed Washoe's efforts to smooth his hair and rearrange his black bow-tie.

"Making hisself pretty," murmured the driver to a wheel-horse.

Washoe affected not to hear. He swung down and opened the door and in a low voice suggested to a half-awake vendor of socks that the view from the box was enticing. Taking the fellow's place he stared across at the gray bundle until the blanket was pushed aside and the gray eyes of Miss Matilda were taking an approving inventory of his appearance.

"Hungry?" he asked.

She nodded and yawned, removed the blanket and sat more erect and shifted the bundle she had used for a pillow.

"Santy Claus must have been here while I was sleeping," she remarked, touching the blanket.

"Belongs to the guard. He thought you might be cold."

"It was nice of you, Mr. Washoe, to think of it for him."

"We'll get a good meal at Genoa. Used to be called the Mormon Station. Lordy! think of the immigrant trains that passed through there since the first house was built in Fifty-one. Nothing but trading-posts in the valley then, some twenty of them; and all living off the California immigrants. The men could only think of reaching California and making fortunes out of gold. They never dreamed of the silver ledges waiting to be opened up. Sorry Kane has often told me of those old days. He says that when the immigrants began to shift over to the Truckee River route there was fifty thousand pounds of flour in this valley that was going begging at fifteen cents a pound. But if they could have got it over to the Truckee road they could easily have swapped a dozen pounds for an ox or a horse.

"Funny how the Mormons built the stations after returning from the California placers and never suspected the tons of stuff all around them. It was only three years ago that the gold miners quit these diggings and come back to us over the ridge and complained about the black stuff in lumps that hindered their mining. They were cursing rich black sulfuret of silver and didn't know it."

Miss Matilda had paid but scant attention to this little recital, for she irrelevantly remarked—

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"Pap will be surprized to see me at Carson City." And her face lighted in anticipation of their meeting.

"But you don't know for sure he's there," said Washoe. "He won't use the telegraph, but he might have written you when he got there. And you say you've received no word."

"Pap ain't long on writing," she naively informed him. "He can make a stab at big print with the best of them, but he always 'lowed that writing makes his head ache."

And while the small face remained grave of expression there was a new twinkle in the big gray eyes.

"Then how do you know he's there?" persisted Washoe, beginning to feel uneasy.

"Oh, pap's had time to mizzle around every river and crick in the territory," she confidently retorted. "He'll be there, camping under his wagon. I'm getting tired of riding in this contraption. I'd like to get out and stretch my legs."

Washoe pondered a few moments and then suggested:

"It's only fifteen miles from Genoa to Carson City. If you wish it we'll eat at Genoa and get a man to drive us over to Carson in a light wagon."

"My fare's paid to Carson," she mused. "If it wasn't for that it would be mighty fine."

"Why, that's easily fixed," he mendaciously assured her. "I'll speak to the driver and get back what the team will cost. It's often done. But just supposing your father isn't at Carson?"

"Then he won't be there; that's all. I'll have to wait till he shows up."

"Know anyone there?"

"Nary a one. But pap won't be worrying about me. He's thinking that Uncle Allen is coming along with me."

"I wasn't worrying about your father worrying. I was thinking about *you*. You'll have to have a good place to stay while waiting for him to show up."

"I'll get some work to do. Can't play the fine lady."

"I'll give you enough to pay your board, and your father can pay me."

"No," she instantly refused. "You don't know pap. While he hates toll-bridge and gates like pizen there's something else he never can understand; paying hard money for one's keep. We've cousined around so much in Tennessee, Missoury, and Arkansas—Pap always calls it Rackansack—that he can't ever get into the notion of paying for bed and victuals. 'Either put up with relations or sleep under the wagon,' he says."

"Then we'll call it a little present," he smilingly urged.

She frowned and replied:

"Mister Washoe, you've been mightily neighborly, but the Jaimson women are scary about taking presents. But don't you fret about *me*. I'm a whole team and a dog under the wagon when it comes to working my way. If pap isn't at Carson he'll be there soon."

"Well, we'll see," mused Washoe. "I'll fix it so you won't be bothered. The average man will assay out top-high, but some never show any color. Women ain't so plenty as they will be in a few years from now."

She understood him and flushed slightly. Patting the rifle she quietly announced:

"So long as I've got Turkey-buster here I 'low I'll be let alone. Don't you lose any sleep about Matilda Jaimson being bothered. We quit Salt Lake City in the night 'cause I drew a bead on a man who was wanting to take another wife."

Washoe grinned, then remarked:

"Thought it was a hard place to get out of. Wonder the man didn't have your wagon stopped."

"We took him along with us across the salt plains. He didn't have much spunk. We let him ride on the seat with pap while I sat in the wagon behind him with Turkey-buster covering his back. At night we tied him up. He knew better then to make a yip when we met folks. When we reached a point where pap said all —— couldn't catch us we give him a bottle of water and turned him loose."

"You'll do, Miss Matilda. You cut ace-high every time. How old are you?"

"Turning eighteen if pap's count is right. Since mammy died ten years ago pap and me have ramshackled 'round quite a bit. Pap's keen to settle down and raise garden-truck, but he's never found just what suited him."

AT LAST they reached Genoa and Washoe held a low conversation with the driver, who at first was dull of comprehension. Finally he grinned and dug down and passed over several coins, the girl witnessing the act.

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"Got some of your passage money back," cheerily said Washoe as he took her bundle and set forth to find an eating-house.

The town was the center of the lumber trade, the timber being cut on the east shore of Tahoe, and much of it being floated down the Carson to less favored regions and sold for fabulous prices. Lumbermen, in for a holiday, thronged the streets. Teamsters bound for and from the mines luridly addressed their animals. Storekeepers were busy waiting on the transient trade and continuously worrying because fresh goods failed to arrive. Among the general riffraff were those in extreme poverty, for more than one barefooted man passed Washoe and his young companion. After the two had obtained a substantial meal at a large frame-shanty the girl disturbed Washoe by insisting on paying her way. He correctly surmised that her stock of money was very small.

Anxious to restore her to her father and surrender further responsibility he left her long enough to secure a light buggy and a good horse. He explained to her it was impossible to engage a driver. She was perfectly contented to be alone with him, and soon they were rapidly covering the road winding about the base of the foot-hills. Already the westerly wind had returned to prevail through the Autumn months, and the heated air was sending whirlwinds of dust spiraling over the hot sand and stunted sage-brush. In Washoe's estimation the river was the only pleasing natural feature, but Miss Matilda thought it all very wonderful. With Turkey-buster, as she called her rifle, wedged between her knees, she enjoyed every mile of the dusty road. Several times she declared—

"When pap strikes it rich I'm going to have a hoss just like this one."

The drive ended at the plaza of Carson. The girl stood up and darted her eager gaze over the several wagons in the square.

"He ain't in any of those outfits," she muttered. "When we find pap he'll be camping beside his wagon."

The plaza was a very busy place, surrounded as it was by stores, assay offices, saloons, gambling and dance halls, and with steady streams of humanity moving around and across it. While fearing Jaimson would not be on hand to greet his daughter, Washoe nevertheless was greatly disappointed. Washoe had work to do and money to make. He could not be handicapped by the care of the ridiculous appearing young person. Not that any one would pause to give heed to homely garments, for human beings could dress as grotesquely as one could imagine and yet escape attention. With a ledge of solid silver filling each mind there was no room for meditation on sartorial eccentricities.

Washoe, however, was a dandy by instinct. He preferred spotless linen and a clean shave to a pocketful of double-eagles were he compelled to choose getween gold and personal appearance. The girl amused him, at moments fascinated him, but he could not long endure the society of a young woman who was wearing a man's cast-off coat, hat, and boots. An inkling of an idea came to him as the girl finished her survey of the plaza.

"No use to look for him except where he'd keep his wagon," she mused. "He'll be with the wagon. He's thataway."

The idea sprouted and grew vigorously. He suggested—

"Suppose you remain here and mind the horse while I circulate around and ask for him."

She nodded, her face rather grave. Washoe hurried away and took the places of business as they came. He soon satisfied himself that no one by the name of Jaimson had been on the plaza. He had expected this much and now was free to develop his plan. Entering a general store he drew a busy merchant back to the store-room and gripped his arm while he explained the girl's predicament.

"But there's no sense in it, Washoe—telling me," impatiently protested the merchant, his eyes watching the perspiring clerks as they endeavored to wait on the trade.

"Here's where you draw cards, Daws," quietly explained Washoe. "Pap Jaimson sent fifty dollars to you to give to his daughter. Sent it in by a miner as he was delayed in getting here."

"Now, now, Washoe! No mixing me up——"

"And here's the money he sent and he was most particular that she should use most of it in buying things. If he can't come soon he'll be sending her in some more. She'll naturally trade here for shoes and the like."

"Washoe, you have a noble heart," cried the merchant, clutching the money.

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"And naturally you wouldn't give the money to any one but the girl. You know me and trust me, but Jaimson sent word most particular that you should hand over the gold to his daughter in person. You told me about it. Now I'll go and tell her and fetch her in here. And for —— sake sell her some shoes and something to wear in place of the old coat she has on!"

Miss Matilda observed his cheerful smile as he came hurrying across the plaza, and she excitedly cried out—

"You found him, Mister Washoe?"

"Not exactly found him, but I hit his trail. He sent a message to you by a miner. Sent it to a storekeeper named Daws. Daws wouldn't talk much to me, although we're old friends. But he says it's your business and not mine. So if you'll hop down we'll go and see him."

When they entered the store Miss Matilda's eyes sparkled at the display of various articles awaiting women purchasers; for women were coming into the diggings in ever increasing numbers, although many of them were of the predatory class and more interested in the price of diamonds than in patterns of calico. Daws left the trade long enough to take the girl aside and crisply repeat the lie taught him by Washoe.

"So, miss," he hurriedly concluded, "you can pick out what you want and if you go over the fifty it's all right, as it's plain your father wants you to dress like a lady and your credit is good."

"Pap's either crazy, or he's struck it mighty rich," she mumbled. "I'll bet a coonskin that the first buying he did out of his pile was a jug of cawn licker. I want some shoes."

"To be sure. And I've an elegant little jacket, Spanish style, you'll like, I know."

Washoe remained near the door while the girl was being outfitted. When she returned to him she was wearing decent footgear, a short Spanish jacket, gay with silver braid and bright buttons, and was carrying a checked dress that would have aroused the violent admiration of a Paiute Indian. On her mass of golden curls was a small white felt hat. Various small accessories had exhausted the fifty dollars and eaten a large hole in another fifty. Washoe felt amply repaid when he beheld the small face flushed with pleasurable excitement over what was her first shopping experience. He offered to carry her bundles, but she hugged them jealously.

Catching the merchant by the arm to detain him Washoe said—

"As for a stopping place I'm sure Mr. Jaimson would wish his daughter to put up at a good one, like the St. Nicholas."

"Undoubtedly. Undoubtedly," hastily agreed Daws.

"What's that?" suspiciously asked the girl. "A tavern?"

"A very decent hotel. Mr. Pierson, the proprietor, will be pleased to provide for you until your father comes," explained Washoe.

"No." And there was no going behind her refusal. "I ain't a doll, nor I ain't bedrid. I'll git work."

Washoe turned to the merchant in despair.

"Ahem. Miss H. K. Clapp, who runs the Sierra Seminary, is keen to get a strong young person to help about the house. You can refer her to me. Seclusion and genteel employment and——"

"What's a sem'nary?" broke in the girl.

"It's a school for young ladies," explained Washoe, mopping his forehead.

"If she'll let me have a whack at schoolbooks I'll work for my board and l'arning," eagerly offered the girl.

"We'll go there and see what the chances are," said Washoe.

As they took to the street Washoe kept glancing down at his companion. Her improved apparel and her animation made her a pleasing picture. She would not surrender any of her precious bundles, but she did allow him to carry the rifle. He drove her up Carson Street to the structure serving as the seminary building and with some trepidation sought an interview with Miss Clapp.

The principal studied Washoe gravely as he explained Miss Matilda's desires. Washoe's bearing was slightly flustered, for the steady gaze was somewhat disconcerting to one who knew gossip often was busy with his name. When he had finished Miss Clapp gazed thoughtfully at Miss Matilda for half a minute, then asked Washoe to excuse them, and took the girl to another room and talked at some length with her. Washoe was perspiring when Miss Clapp returned alone, but a glance at her smiling face reassured him.

"Miss Matilda has convinced me that

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you have been good to her," she began. "She is as self-reliant as a man in many things, and as credulous as a ten-year-old child in others. She shall stay here until her father arrives, longer if she desires and does well. We will help her all we can. It is best you don't see her—for awhile. She is impressionable."

"Thank you very kindly, ma'am," muttered Washoe. "I just wanted to get her located right. I'll be going now."

"I promised her she should say good-by to you. I think it's best it should be 'good-by' for some time."

"Certainly, ma'am. If you'll trot her out we'll have it over with and I'll be getting back to my work."

She glanced at his smooth hands and queried—

"In trade?"

"Mining. Also interested in banking."

He did not consider it necessary to explain his "banking" activities were confined to backing a faro-bank. Miss Clapp soon returned with the girl, who took Washoe's limp hand and with a touch of emotion declared:

"You're a white man, Mister Washoe. If you ever need a friend to bust a cap just get word to me and I'll come on the jump with old Turkey-buster oiled and ready."

Washoe was confused and did not know what he mumbled in reply. He was glad to be his own boss again; and feeling the need of liquid refreshment he left the rig to be called for, and hastened to the St. Nicholas bar and called for a glass of Jacob Klein's famous beer that sold to miners for three dollars a gallon. It was very pleasant when drawn cool from the wood.

BEFORE he had taken a swallow he discovered there was but one topic being discussed in the bar-room, the mystery surrounding the rich samples of ore dropped by Feeble Thomas in the Placerville saloon. Washoe, used as he was to the rapid circulation of truth and rumors, was surprized to find the incident had the town by the ears. Not only had the stage brought word, but hours ahead of Driver Pete the telegraph had flashed the news. It was now known throughout the diggings and already had created a rare flurry of excitement in San Francisco. Those in the St. Nicholas bar believed another Comstock lode was to be uncovered, and repeatedly were queries shouted as to the antecedents and the whereabouts of Kane and Thomas. Once the men arrived Washoe knew they would be dogged night and day.

"Kell" Hawkins, a short-card professional, lounged up beside Washoe, exchanged salutations and accepted a drink.

"Whole valley is all torn out because those two old bummers have been showing some rich ore," drawled Hawkins. "Probably they stole it from the Ophir dump."

"I scarcely believe either Thomas or Kane would have the nerve to do that and risk getting plugged even if they had the inclination. They're too honest and too timid. I was there when Thomas showed the samples in Roney's Place. He was trying to swap the stuff for a couple of drinks."

"If that's the case then we're in for another rush. Bigger the rush the richer the pickings. But ain't that a piece of —— luck!" growled the gambler. "If they didn't steal the ore then they've stumbled on to a ledge that can buy more whisky than all the lakes in Nevada can hold, and they try to peddle it for six inches of tarantula-juice. Who are they, anyway?"

"I've known them ever since I came over the ridge with the first rush. But I only know them as others do. Both seemed timid. Seldom visit any of the towns except to get some supplies. But they won't be alone any more once they get back here."

"Don't believe they've done any prospecting," declared Hawkins. "Just stumbled on to some out-croppings while mooning around and broke off a few hunks."

"I never knew of their prospecting any. Yet they might be at it regular, and I wouldn't know. They are two timid men who've lived in the valley so long they can't feel at home anywhere else."

Hawkins' pale face took on a little smile, and he shifted the subject to inquire abruptly—

"Who's the little ragmuffin I saw you with?"

Washoe's eyes narrowed.

"A little lady from Missouri," he politely corrected. "I was helping her find her father."

"I'll give odds you didn't find the old man," chuckled Hawkins.

Washoe stared him full in the face and growled:

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"I never rob cradles, Hawkins. Don't laugh that way again—please."

The last word contained the threat. Hawkins' thin features straightened, and his eyes blinked none as he returned Washoe's steady gaze.

"It's all right," he murmured in a velvet voice. "I don't look over any man's shoulder and advise him how to play his hand. But I don't like your tone, Washoe."

"Sorry. But the game goes as it lies. I wonder if any word has been received about Kane and Thomas starting back. The telegraph will keep the valley posted."

"They're being feasted and liquored and watched every minute," said Hawkins with a return to his drawling intonation. "By the way, and speaking of business: Planter and Moses are here and keen for a little game with a liberal limit. Feel any interest?"

"I was going on to Virginia, but if we could start now I'd play for a few hours."

"Get a room. I'll hunt them up."

Hawkins bustled away to promote what to him was his only pastime and business, a stiff game of poker, while Washoe went to secure a room. Glad to be alone Washoe remained in the room, standing at the window and staring out on the street at the shifting pageant of ox-wagons, pack-trains, heavy freight-wagons, men afoot and men mounted, with a whirlpool of activity swirling up and down the border of the dusty road as speculators in Carson town lots made their trades and took their profits. It was a familiar spectacle to Washoe, and his thought soon turned to the quaint, honest little woman from the border States. He wondered what had become of her eccentric father. What would happen if her father never showed up?

"I'll stake her till she finds out the truth. Then look out for squalls! Lord! what wouldn't she do if she knew it was my money she'd spent at Daws? If she ever learns that I want to be out the country," he told himself with a nervous little grin.

His meditations were interrupted by the sight of Hawkins walking between Moses and Planter. Moses was hawk-nosed and wore a collar that came up to the back of his head, increasing his likeness to the vulture tribe. Planter was a flamboyant style of a man, big of physique and florid of face. He possessed a rich, hearty voice that aided him much in concealing his cold-blooded and wholly selfish nature. In the rôle of a Sacramento or Frisco business man out for a good time he was invaluable to the craft as a decoy. In Virginia City's big games he often furnished the victims and worked on a percentage.

Washoe had met him in professional bouts several times and never was able to decide whether the fellow was phenomenally lucky or inordinately clever. What attracted his attention to the trio was Hawkins walking between the two, his hands resting confidentially on their shoulders. The three heads were close together as if holding a secret conference. There was something so suggestive of stealth in the bearing of the three men that Washoe instinctively slipped his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets and caressed the two derringers.

"Kell Hawkins is up to dirty work," he mused. "He didn't like my talk in the bar. Moses and Planter are sitting in with him. Wonder what they'll try to work."

He cast a glance about the room and selected a chair that would bring his back to the wall, with the street window on his right hand and hall door on his left. Elevating his heels to the table he lighted a cigar and drew his slouch hat low over his eyes. Thus the three found him, apparently half-asleep.

Moses greeted him curtly, for his was ever the business bearing. Planter insisted on shaking hands effusively while he declared his joy because of the meeting. A waiter brought in half a dozen sealed packs of cards, a bottle and glasses.

"Fifty limit all right to start off with, Washoe?" briskly asked Hawkins as he broke a seal and shuffled the deck.

"Anything to please," lazily replied Washoe. "Nearly fell asleep while waiting for you fellows. That stage ride always takes the tuck out of me. I have two thousand dollars waiting for me at the International in Virginia. Of course I have the privilege of giving my I. O. U's on that if I get cleaned of ready cash?"

"Of course!" heartily boomed Planter. "Your word's good enough for little George Planter without any I. O. U."

"A man might drop dead. An I. O. U. is all right. Business is business," muttered Moses.

The game commenced, and as hand followed hand Moses' head sank lower and

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lower on his chest until he strongly suggested a bird of prey. Planter threw off his coat and persisted in his jovial laughter, although draw after draw failed to better his hand. Hawkins' bleak face never changed—he was as sparing of words as Planter was prodigal. Washoe played with what appeared to be lazy indifference, never hesitating in making a discard, or in betting. At times he yawned as if in need of sleep, and on the whole did not display much interest in the game.

"They've got to come to me! They've got to come to me!" Planter kept repeating in a tiresome monotone, relieved at times by outbursts of artificial mirth at his own poor luck.

Washoe felt his way, waiting to discover the purpose of the secret conference he had witnessed from the window. At the end of an hour Planter was the only loser of any consequence. Washoe was less than fifty dollars behind. Planter's round face still simulated vast good nature, and briskly rubbing his hand he confidently declared his next draw would sweep the board. But the insincerity of this display was plain to all, and to Washoe, at least, was proving to be annoying. As Hawkins took the cards from Washoe to deal, Planter spilled a glass of liquor and caused Washoe to draw back to escape contamination. With much cursing at his own awkwardness, and with many abject apologies to Washoe, Planter mopped up the whisky with a handkerchief and picked up his hand.

Washoe smilingly declared that "accidents" would happen and picked up his cards without looking at them, well knowing that the space of a few seconds when his attention was distracted had been ample for Hawkins to pave the way for a climax.

Moses tapped the table to announce he could not, or would not, open. Planter puffed his thick lips and affected to be hesitating, then rapped the table and cried—

"I've got 'em, but that's about all."

Washoe, with his cards face down on the table, softly passed his fingers over them and with a frosty glance at the impassive Hawkins opened for ten dollars. Hawkins' gaze was that of a basilisk as he broke his rule of silence and murmured—

"Opening without making sure you have openers?"

"I have openers," softly replied Washoe, leaving his cards face-down and tilting back his chair and hooking a thumb in a waistcoat pocket. Moses' upper lip receded under his hooked nose. Planter stared in surprize at Washoe's assurance, and he mildly protested:

"No man can know what he has 'less he looks, Washoe. Just to be regular I'd like to have you bury your openers when you come to draw."

"Yes, if any one comes in."

Hawkins went in, snatched a second glance at his hand and made it the limit to draw cards. Moses slowly pushed in his money. Planter elevated his brows whimsically, finally went in, and remarked:

"Rather have you fellows get it than a stranger. I can get a stake from either of you."

"Not from me," coldly announced Moses, never shifting his gaze from his cards.

Washoe softly shuffled his five cards, backs up, and deliberated. Hawkins drawled—

"Does second-sight tell you what they're worth?"

WASHOE threw in fifty dollars and then raised it fifty. Hawkins raised the limit. Moses dropped without a word. Planter cursed boisterously and dropped. Still refusing to look at his hand Washoe raised again. Hawkins pushed in a hundred. Washoe promptly raised back. Another hundred from Hawkins. Washoe refused to call. Twice more was the challenge tossed back and forth, then Hawkins quit, saying:

"I'm not going it blind. Nothing more from me before the draw. Cards?"

Then Washoe bothered to look at his hand, three kings and a pair of deuces. Hawkins had his kings bettered; therefore he had three aces. Having provided for every contingency Hawkins would have him beaten no matter how he drew; therefore the second card on the deck must be the fourth ace. Hawkins would get that if Washoe played his hand. If Washoe discarded the deuces he could not better, for the second card would be the ace, and never was there any chance of the fourth king being left in the top cards. Blind luck could not even help him if he threw away his hand and took five cards, for the fourth ace would be there with Hawkins holding three. The possibility of drawing four of a kind with the ace, in a stacked

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deck, was too remote to be considered. It required but a second for Washoe thoroughly to grasp the situation.

Hawkins pressed his thumb on the top card. Washoe placed his hand face down and tilted back his chair a bit and rested his right hand on the table. Hawkins' eyes narrowed to slits as he beheld the double-barrel derringer pointing at his fifth rib. Moses and Planter were rigid. Washoe softly announced:

"I'm keen to take this pot. It ain't much; yet I'm keen to take it."

"What's the matter with you, Washoe?" whispered Hawkins, the perspiration showing on his forehead. "You're not drunk. Bet your hand and earn the pot if you want it. What does that pocket-gun mean? Is this a hold-up?"

"It means you're in borrasca on this deal, Hawkins. It means that the man who beats that hand takes a trip to Boot Hill." And he flirted the five cards on to the mound of money, faces up.

"Well, of all the —— ways of playing a friendly game!" roared Planter, striving for a display of righteous indignation.

Moses darted a bird-like glance at Hawkins' gray face, then another at Washoe's smooth visage. Hawkins hoarsely exclaimed—

"You must be crazy!"

"I'll wager five hundred dollars that you have three aces in your hand and that I can pick them out without seeing them. There is another ace among the top three cards. Does either one of you want to take my wager?" He waited, but neither of the three spoke. With a quick motion of the muzzles of the derringer he flipped over the first two cards and revealed the fourth ace.

Speaking quietly he continued:

"So that's how it seems to be. Now it ain't the cold-deck I'm kicking on. Against that I'll blame my foolishness in taking my eyes off from you, Hawkins, when Planter so carefully upset the whisky. But what I can't forgive and never will forgive is your carelessness in using a marked deck when you stacked these hands. That hurts me cruelly. It insults my intelligence. It's worse than just saying I am young, with green in my eye. You have hurt my pride, Hawkins. I'm a sensitive cuss; that's what's the matter. How could you be so foolish, when you had all the time between leaving me at the bar and returning to this room, to use a marked deck instead of stacking a fresh one? It just shows you're lazy, or shiftless, Hawkins. Down-right shiftless! So I'll let the pot go as it lays, simply remarking it's a one-way trip to Boot Hill if this king-full is bettered."

Hawkins slowly tore up his hand and threw the pieces on the floor. Then rising and resting the tips of his fingers on the table he softly said—

"Of course this can't end here, and in this way."

"I suppose not," sighed Washoe, raking in the pot with his left hand. "I reckoned it would end a little more violently when I looked down on the street and saw you three fellows planning it up. Plotting a cold-deck of *marked* cards on the public street! Hawkins, you've broken my heart. Go, please; before I forget I am a man and begin to weep."

Without a word Hawkins left the room followed by Moses and Planter. The last made his exit with a pantomime of extreme bewilderment, only in tossing his hands about he took good care to keep them away from his waist-line. The moment the door closed Washoe was on his feet and across the room, both derringers ready. But he could hear the steps going down-hall; the quick, nervous, angry step of Hawkins; the shuffling step of Moses, and the ponderous clumping of Planter's big boots. When he could no longer hear their steps Washoe glided to the window. He waited until he saw the three men emerge, cross to the plaza and mount their horses and ride down the road toward Silver City.

"So it's to be in Virginia City," he murmured.

For despite his raillery he knew he had antagonized three leaders of the powerful gambling ring and that a penalty would be demanded. He knew the odds would be against him when next he went up the slope of Mount Davidson. He wondered if he had been foolishly reckless in doing as he had done; if it had been better simply to drop out of the game.

"No," he decided, speaking aloud. "If I had tried to quit Hawkins would have acted nasty and it would have come to a fight with the three jumping on me as one. Well, it'll all come out in the wash—in Virginia City."

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## CHAPTER III

### WASHOE BREAKS HIS TRAIL

WASHOE was a product of the coast. He arrived in California in 1850 at the impressionable age of thirteen. The death of his grandfather left him with no relatives east of the Mississippi, and very soon the placid Indiana background became blurred and colorless. He ceased being a diffident country boy and became very precocious for his young years. He grew up among scenes of hysterical speculation, mad gambling in the direct form of cards, and extravagant spending. It was the age of prodigalities, and his natural keenness of wit quickly responded to his surroundings. The drifting course he had followed gave him too much knowledge of things a man should learn about slowly, if at all, and this when he was yet in his 'teens.

Passing from gold placer to placer, lingering in town after town, and seeing many towns die overnight, his mind fed on a rapid succession of incidents without dwelling overlong on the probable accumulative effect. The rest of the continent and the stupendous war of the States were beyond the rim of his direct interest. From intimate association with Southern men his sympathies were with the seceding states. He knew Southerners as a rule were genial, hospitable fellows, and he liked them. His historical background was formed after he reached California. He liked what his friends liked. His best wishes were with Stonewall Jackson's army; but he never paused to wonder if his own destiny were anyway involved in the struggle. It was all too far away, too impersonal, and each day was presenting an immediate task to be accomplished.

It was the time and place of high play, and he gambled with cards, just as he gambled recklessly in trading feet in the thousand and one alleged mines. His theory of success was to get the best of the other fellow in a trade. He had paid a fair price in acquiring this belief. All the successful men he knew were gamblers in some guise or other. Merchants gambled when they started a train of goods to a new camp. Lawyers gambled for places of preferment. The man who bought town lots in any one of the unbuilt "cities" was wagering he could get out from under with a fat profit before the boom collapsed. And so on, down to the very street gamins aping their elders. His sense of humor only could tone down his indignation had any one told him it was immoral to back a hand at poker, or take the bank at faro.

His experience with the trio of card-sharpers was a legitimate risk of his occupation. Other men ran as deadly risks whenever they entered the average bar to obtain a drink. And yet thirst was served. The fact that the card-game must likely terminate in an exchange of shots wounded his vanity more than it disturbed his courage. He had prided himself on being a notch above Kell Hawkins, and yet the fellow had assumed otherwise in endeavoring to fleece him with a cold-deck. And a cold-deck of marked cards only doubled the insult. He nursed a deadly resentment against Hawkins as he stood at the window and watched the three men ride away; but no amount of anger could blunt his excellent judgment.

The test at poker had shifted over to a test in a much sterner game, where life was the stake. Not a bit did he underestimate his danger. While a card-gambler at times, he could not be reckoned as a fast-dyed brother of the fraternity; for he had other lines of business. His standing, from the viewpoint of Hawkins' veteran associates, was that of a brilliant amateur. He was not one of the clique, although often mingling with its members on amiable terms. Hawkins would proclaim him an enemy to the craft in Virginia, and no silly sentiment of personal friendship could shield one from the ring's vengeance. He had grabbed a pot at the point of a gun—unpardonable technique once he had accepted his hand and had bet the other man to a standstill.

A scant hour back and he was free to ride into Virginia and be greeted genially by a score of men who would now eye him coldly and listen unmoved when word was passed that he was dead. The space of an hour had been sufficient to dig a gulf between him and the hill city. He must be ever watchful and most adroit in approaching the town. Could he get entrenched in his room then he would have time to spy out the land and receive reports from good friends. On the surface there would be no indications of the pending duel. The underworld would know all about it, however, and

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wagers would be placed on the outcome within a few hours of Hawkins' arrival at the Magnolia. Washoe could even vision the scene as those in the secret jockeyed for odds on his arriving alive, on his living a certain number of days, on his taking one or more of the gang with him. He believed it would be even money that the climax, regardless of results, would be reached on a Saturday night, for it was on this day that the miners flocked in and jammed the brothels, dance-halls and other dens, and the enemy would have finesse enough to use the weekly increase in population as a mask for murder. No marked cards would be in the next cold-deck.

HE DESCENDED to the barroom and warily surveyed the gathering before joining the excited crowd. Word had been telegraphed from Placerville that Kane and Thomas would probably arrive by stage on the morrow.

"That means some of them —— Frisco sharps have snagged the old fools and are putting up stage-fare for them!" bitterly complained a begrimed prospector.

"Let 'em furnish the grub-stake," cried another. "Nothing to hinder us from trailing along and locating."

Rabbits will pause to play when being chased by a wolf. Washoe entered upon several hours of busy work in accepting feet in dubious prospects for equally dubious holdings of his own, although he knew the wolves were on his trail. But until he came to a "show-down" with the Virginia City ring he could find no reason for abstaining from what was his chief pleasure as well as major vocation. Experience had taught him that lightning does strike with a certain degree of regularity. He would not wager a dollar on the actual value of any of his new holdings, but he would plunge recklessly that some one of the dozen odd he acquired that afternoon would pay him several hundred to one. He had traded for Burning Moscow when it was going a-begging at forty dollars a foot, and had sold it at seven hundred a foot. He had parted with what he believed to be worthless feet and had been warmly thanked by his victim who had realized a fortune. But throughout all his vicissitudes he had retained his optimism, a great love of life, and a very lively appreciation of the humorous.

This last quality was one of his mainstays; it permitted him to enjoy the joke when he was the victim. What the East might consider vices, formed his ordinary plane of living. He had inherited and retained a great respect for womanhood, and this legacy kept him from uncleanliness. Being among the few who did not sin against the sex he cast no stones. He saw something very human even in those who paraded their expensive gowns through the dust and refuse of Virginia. And these members of the ancient profession sometimes sought him secretly for advice and help as they would have gone to a brother, who would listen without condemning.

After exhausting the more attractive trade possibilities, Washoe took a walk around the plaza and then strolled by the seminary. He found it would be pleasant to see the girl with the squirrel-rifle and hear her quaint views on life in general. He wondered vaguely why he had been so ready to place her aside, but was glad she was not dependent upon him now that a storm was brewing. He did not venture to call at the seminary, as there had been something in Miss Clapp's manner that warned him he would be injuring the girl's chances did he seek to see her.

On returning to the hotel he changed his room and retired to it and spent the evening figuring mythical fortunes out of his different deals. It depended upon his optimism how much of a paper profit he had made; and he was as strong in that cheerful disposition as the Comstock was rich in silver.

In the morning he reconnoitered the street and plaza and then called on Daws, the merchant, and bought two Colts, thirty-sixes, and a quantity of water-proof packs of prepared cartridges and a box of caps. He was very particular in selecting a holster to wear under his left arm and carried only one gun in his belt. He loaded both weapons before leaving the store and then returned to the hotel and took his position at the window. It was a long wait, but at last the east-bound coach rolled in and, as he had expected, he saw Sorry Kane and Feeble Thomas emerge, closely followed by a stout man with protruding, fishy eyes.

But he had forgotten about Bill Mayfield, and when that individual jumped through the door and raced for the bar he changed his mind about descending and greeting the two eccentric cronies. Bill's haste,

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however, could be interpreted to mean something more than zeal to get a drink. The gang could scarcely have sent word to him to look up Washoe and attend to him, for the telegraph was not a suitable medium for conveying the request to one so little given to quick wit. Instructions to Mayfield must leave nothing for the imagination. So Washoe remained at the window, his ear cocked to catch any footsteps in the hall, and was rewarded by the reappearance of the desperado after the driver had shouted his second warning. As the coach rolled down the street Washoe descended to the bar.

He found Kane and Thomas standing at the end of the bar, distrustfully eying the men who were crowding around them and offering liquor by the glass and bottle. The stout man, angry of visage, stood behind Thomas and insisted on paying for all the liquor the two friends consumed.

"What ye mean? Think ye can hog it all?" howled a would-be host.

"Thinks his —— Montgomery street cunning will put him in bonanza," jeered another.

But the stout person had been selected for his dogged determination to do his duty and he returned scowl for scowl and retired his two charges in good order to a corner and seated himself so as to fence them from the ravening mob.

Washoe leaned against the bar and ordered a beer and grinned a greeting at the two dejected men. As one they came to their feet and Thomas loudly insisted:

"I ain't done no wrong. By gawdfrey! I'm going to speak to a real friend."

And the two clambered over their guard's outstretched legs and joined Washoe, who nodded to the bartender. The stout person bustled forward to make one of the group.

"Mister, you mizzle," advised Washoe. Then to the hungry, watchful crowd he said: "Sorry and Feeble are going to have a quiet drink without being pestered. They don't owe you anything. This is my party and I'm too stingy to entertain more'n these two just now."

The stout man hesitated, then fell back to the corner. The others glared at Washoe, but allowed him a few feet of privacy. Every backbone stiffened, and the spectators surged a step nearer when Kane whispered in Washoe's ear.

Washoe relaxed and threw his hat on the bar and laughed in whole-hearted amusement. At other times there would have been something infectious in his uncontrolled risibles. Traces of grins did twitch a beard here and there with the exception of the stout man's stony face. When he could speak Washoe turned to the throng and weakly explained—

"Boys, Sorry says he begins to suspect he and Feeble have been *followed*."

Even the jealous, avaricious mob was not proof against this, and there was a general explosion. The onlookers, too, relaxed and good-naturedly retired a few feet. Even did the two desert rats tell all they knew to Washoe it would be difficult for the young man to profit by their invitation without finding a long procession of miners at his heels. And it would be much better for Washoe to secure the secret than to have it locked up in the stout man's head for the exclusive benefit of Frisco sharpers. Washoe belonged to the valley; Washoe was a good boy. These and many other expressions of approbation.

"This ain't no place to talk, and we'd masterly like to talk to you, Washoe," mumbled Kane wearily.

"You can come up to my room. They'll probably fill the hall, but they won't come inside. I'm not curious to learn your business. I have more trouble of my own than you can shake a stick at. Don't come unless you want to."

"We want to," promptly said Thomas. "But that feller behind us, who paid our fares up here, won't like it."

"Did you ask him to pay your fares, or promise him anything if he did?"

"No, no. He just was doggone sot on doing it. Wouldn't listen to anything," explained Kane.

"Then it was a bit of philanthropy. He's got a big heart under that checked wescoat of his," declared Washoe loudly. "Carson admires men with big hearts. Now when you two go up to my room that man wouldn't dream of trying to crowd in."

The stout man bounced from his chair and snapped out—

"Where those men go, I go."

"Stranger, you'll be in borrasca if you don't reverse your bet," advised Washoe. To the crowd he announced: "Boys, Feeble and Sorry are tired. They want to be alone. If they spill any silver news to me and are willing for me to profit by it I'll do so only

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on the understanding that all of you share the chance with me, Kane and Thomas to have their first pick." Wheeling again to the stout man he added, "And so long as you've brought them back I reckon you can take pot-luck with the crowd, but no one else from Sacramento or Frisco."

The crowd cheered ecstatically. Washoe was a boy of his word; Washoe was a bully boy with a glass eye. One enthusiast howled:

"—— his hide! I allers liked him!"

AND without being followed even to the hallway the three repaired to Washoe's room where a bottle quickly followed. Washoe motioned to the whisky and the table and threw himself on the bed and smoked.

After a drink Kane timidly asked—

"But why did that perfect stranger pay our fares up here, Washoe?"

Washoe grinned, highly delighted, and explained—

"In hopes you'd lead him to the ledge where you got those samples."

"We ain't got no ledge," said Kane.

"You'll have hard work making the boys believe that unless you tell where you stole them."

"We didn't steal 'em, Washoe," protested Thomas, and he combed a lean hand through his gray whiskers. "And we're tired of being pestered with questions and having strange men leaning over our shoulders and whispering in our ears. We're going to sneak back home and lay low."

"I'm not asking a single question," cheerily informed Washoe. "If I had a place to sneak to and lie low I'd be making for it."

"Trouble, Washoe?" sympathetically asked Thomas.

"I've got a lead mine on my hands," was the grave reply.

"Lead mine?" repeated Kane in great perplexity. "How can that fetch you trouble? Can't you sell it?"

Washoe slapped his knee, then soberly explained—

"The lead is in the shape of bullets."

"You mean you're in danger?" cried Thomas.

"Rake in the pot."

Thomas peered at Kane, and the latter slowly nodded his head. Thomas cleared his throat with another drink and said:

"Washoe, we trust you. You're a good boy. You wouldn't set none of them hounds on our trail even if you knew where we den up."

"Of course not."

Thomas coughed gently and his partner nodded for him to continue. In a low whisper he informed:

"We live in an old tunnel, two miles beyond Silver City. Now and then a man stumbles on it, but such know it's deserted and no good, and they pass on. It's real home-like. Kane's even got some books there. One's a humdinger. Make a Digger Injun set up and snort. *Count O' Monte Cristo.* Lawd! but he did rip 'round and hoot! And spend money! He must 'a' had a Comstock lode behind him."

"Go on, Feeble," prompted Kane.

"Well, Sorry and me would be proud to have you make us a visit if you want a quiet spot to rest up in. We ain't asking no questions."

Washoe blew a few smoke rings and considered the proposition. He was more than ever impressed with the need of breaking his trail before entering Virginia. By this time word had been passed for his goings and comings to be noted and already the St. Nicholas undoubtedly held a spy or two. Finally he told the two men:

"I'm not interested in your silver secret. I'm too busy trying to save my own hide from a shot in the back. Open your ears, for I must talk soft."

And as they leaned forward to catch his low-spoken words he gave an outline of his quarrel with the three gamblers and explained the need of a surreptitious entrance to Virginia.

"Now I'll be glad to do this," he said in conclusion. "You two take me home with you and I'll break my journey to Virginia by staying a bit with you. I'll pick my night for entering the town and they won't be flashing a word ahead. Of course we myst be very sly in leaving this place, for you'll be closely watched. I'll arrange for a trusty man to take us to Silver City. We'll leave the carriage before striking the town and sneak around it and to your tunnel. That'll allow you to shake all these nosey people off your track and will let me drop out of sight for a bit."

"Anything you say, Washoe," promptly agreed Kane. "But we'll have to pack some grub along. We ain't got much at the tunnel."



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"I'll attend to the supplies."

"I believe in you, Washoe," added Thomas. "But I hate the idee of you packing in any grub."

"I'll arrange for that while I'm hiring my man. He'll do the buying for us. We'll make it tomorrow night. It's better we're not together any more than we can help till then. I'll get word to you some time tomorrow, just a word giving the place and time we're to meet. Be sure you're not followed. Now it's time you were showing yourselves in the barroom. Here's some money. Don't show it, or they'll know where it came from, but get a room outside the hotel somewhere and be in here at the bar during the afternoon. You'd better go back to the bar for a while as I want to leave the hotel without making them think I'm trailing you. If they ask questions simply say you've told me nothing as yet."

He waited ten minutes after they left him and then descended directly to the street. His surmise about being spied upon was soon proven, for he discovered he was being followed before he had walked half around the plaza. To shake the fellow off he entered Daws' store and began to look at trousers. His man came in and became interested in revolvers. Selecting a pair of trousers Washoe asked a clerk where he could try them on. As he had expected the clerk pointed to the storeroom in the rear, the only available place. Entering this and closing the door he slipped out the back door and inside of sixty seconds had found his friend, the stable-keeper, and had given him money and directions for providing a light wagon and buying a written list of supplies. Then he regained the storeroom and entered the store and said:

"Too tight. Haven't any time to try on another pair now."

His shadow followed him back to the hotel. Entering the barroom he bought some cigars, nodded to Sorry and Feeble seated in the corner with the stout man, and did some figuring on the back of an old envelope. He observed that the stranger was talking earnestly, with Feeble and Sorry listening to him stupidly and somewhat under the influence of drink. Replacing the envelope Washoe passed out to the street, picking up his spy, and took another turn about the town. Once more he passed by the seminary, but caught no glimpse of Miss Matilda.

Turning back toward the hotel he entered the express-office and booked his passage for the morrow through to Sacramento and paid over the money. As he turned to go out he passed close to the spy, but refrained from noticing him. A few rods down the street he halted and lighted a cigar and glanced up the street. The spy was just emerging from the express-office. Instead of coming after Washoe he crossed to the telegraph office. Washoe entered an assay office and from the window saw the fellow come out and hurry into the nearest drinking-saloon.

"Now he knows I'm going to leave the country, starting tomorrow, he's sent word to Virginia and can take a holiday," murmured Washoe with a dry grin. "Well, it's Hawkins' money that paid for the fare."

Returning to the St. Nicholas barroom once more he drank a beer slowly while doing more figuring. Feeble and Sorry were still in the corner, and their guard apparently had talked himself out. Finishing his figuring Washoe glanced up and called out—

"Drinks here for you, Thomas and Kane."

They came forward quickly and were at the bar before the stout person was on his feet. Feeble secured the tiny piece of paper containing the directions,

Back of Rickert's stable. 8 o'clock. Be careful.

Washoe beckoned to the stout person also to partake. The man eagerly stepped in between Washoe and the two men and called for whisky. He raised his glass to Washoe and said—

"To our better acquaintance."

"Drink hearty," replied Washoe, turning as if to go.

"You've got the inside track," murmured the stranger. "My name's Bilson."

"I'm known as Washoe. If you mean inside track on my two friends' secret I'll say I've learned nothing except that they have located no ledge."

"Tell that to babies," scoffed Bilson.

"I'm telling it to you because you asked. These men are my friends. If they knew of a rich location they'd take me in. They tell me they did not find the samples you saw at Placerville. Their word goes. They haven't."

Bilson looked worried.

"Then I've lost my money and wasted my time. Yet I'll stick along a while."

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"You'll be more than welcome so far as my friends go. Only you must keep them in liquor, or they'll get peevish. I told you and the crowd here yesterday that if I learned anything which I was free to tell I'd take in all my friends and you. I learned nothing, not even in confidence."

He left the three standing at the bar and went to his room. There he remained until the supper bell rang. Finishing his meal he went back to his room and waited until fifteen minutes to eight, when he descended and mingled with the crowd in the barroom. For five minutes he was kept busy denying that he had obtained any information from Kane or Thomas. While he was talking he glimpsed Bilson working his way through the various groups as if searching for some one. Neither Kane nor Thomas were in the room. When it lacked but a few minutes of the hour he left the hotel by a back door, and in a circuitous route reached Rickert's stable. Two horses were hitched to a two-seated wagon and the driver was on the front seat.

"Climb in and draw that blanket over your shoulders and take off that hat," murmured the driver. "Grub's aboard."

"But I must wait for my friends——"

The driver coughed loudly and Thomas and Kane ran from the stable, flung themselves into the back seat and hooded their heads with a blanket. They kept off the main street until clear of the town when they struck into the stage road. When within a quarter of a mile of Silver City Washoe ordered the driver to stop. Securing the food the three men piled out and picked their way through the darkness along the edge of the town. Regaining the stage road they walked until Thomas, in the lead, turned to one side and led the way over an abandoned dump and to a dark opening in the side of a hill. He passed his hand up and down and whispered:

"All three strings in place. Nobody's been here."

"I can't see anything," muttered Washoe.

"You don't need to. We'll strike a light when we get inside," whispered Kane.

WASHOE stretched out his hand and encountered a blanket. Thomas pulled this to one side and entered. When the three were in the tunnel and the heavy blanket was back in place Feeble fumbled around until he found a candle. This he lighted and led the way for a dozen feet down the tunnel. Then he turned to the right-hand wall and disappeared. The dull glow from the candle guided Washoe, however, and as he passed through the opening he smiled approvingly at the snug quarters.

For want of something better to do in their many idle hours the two men had excavated three rooms at the right of the tunnel. The flickering light revealed gold-bearing quartz in the roof and silver indications in the walls. The first apartment was used as a kitchen and dining-room, the chimney, Kane proudly explaining, extending through a few feet of the rocky roof. Back of this room was one containing couches of sage-brush covered with flour bags. A shelf had been dug in the wall and this held a dozen ragged volumes.

"There's another shake-down in the next room," Sorry Kane proudly announced. "You can sleep in there, or out here. There's small air shafts running up through the rock."

"I'll take the spare room," laughed Washoe. "I'm tired enough to sleep standing up. You're seldom bothered by callers?"

"Not often. Newcomers sometimes stop, but when the old hands tell 'em we're crazy to try for color here they give us a clear berth. Of course there's been too much living in holes around here for this old tunnel to be noticed."

"I slept in a coyote hole part of the Spring of Sixty," yawned Washoe. "Dug it out till I almost had room enough to turn around in. Then I sold it as a mineral claim for nine hundred dollars. Let me have a candle and I'll turn in."

He spread his blanket over the couch in the last room and was about to extinguish his candle when his friends came to the entrance and Thomas said:

"Me'n Sorry have been talking. We've got something to tell you. It's about that pay ore."

"No, no. That's your secret. Keep it. Hope you both make millions."

"But it ain't our secret. We can talk all we want to. We'll never make a cent out of that ore. We don't even know where the stuff come from."

Washoe winced. He had believed the two men trusted him. Now the silver madness was in their blood and they were anxious to deceive him. He picked up his blanket and coldly informed them:

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"So long as you think that low-down of me I'll be trotting along. It's only two miles to Gold Hill."

"We never found any ore! We never stole any ore!" shrilly protested Kane. "I never see the stuff till Feeble brought it here. A man give it to him out in the Reese River valley."

"Stop your lying and forget I ever was here," growled Washoe, striding to the exit.

"I tell you a man named Jaimson, a Tennessee cuss, gave it to me," broke in Feeble Thomas. "He gave it to me so's I'd fetch a letter in and mail it. He said he'd hurt his wrist and couldn't write. So I l'arned it by heart and wrote it and mailed it the day before you see us at Strawberry Flat. It was only a few words, and I got them down cold:

"Don't start till you hear from me—PAP."

Washoe dropped his blanket and slumped down on the rough couch and gaped in amazement. Finally he managed to whisper—

"Who was to get that letter?"

"If the stage has done its duty it's now in the hands of Matildy Jaimson, Sacramento, care of Allen Jaimson," replied Thomas. "Yes, sir! I wrote and mailed that letter in Genoa. When I got back here and showed my rich samples to Sorry he 'lowed we oughter take a trip over the ridge to Placerville. He had a little money. He wanted to cel'brate my coming back. And at Genoa I wrote and mailed that letter. Then we got a ride with a freighter and crossed the ridge and got b'iling drunk and used up all the money. Then you come in just when I dropped the samples. Lord, Washoe! It wasn't that Bilson alone we've been dodging. We've been dodging the whole world. We had a chance to take in some sixty thousand silent partners. But Sorry and me are honest. We didn't have no mine. We wouldn't make money out of it by cheating. That Bilson paid our fares before we knew what he was doing."

"Well, of all the— You met Jaimson in the Reese River valley. He gave you the samples. Did he have a wagon with him?"

"Sleeping under it. He must have struck it b'iling rich. He drove me back from the mouth of a gulch just east of Jacob's overland station. He had a long rifle. I never carry guns, being a man of peace."

"That's Pap Jaimson. All right. I'll stay here. Thanks for the talk. Good-night."

Washoe's head was in a whirl when he lay down in the blackness and endeavored to sleep. It was one of the ironies of fate that this wanderer from the States, presumably entirely ignorant of pay-ore, had stumbled upon a fortune. How much a part the man's antipathy to toll-gates and ferries had played in the discovery was mere guess-work. Washoe was extremely glad for Miss Matilda, and, being human, he wished he might work a finger into what promised to be a most succulent silver pie.

In the morning after tinned food had been opened and added to some of Sorry's sinewy flap-jacks Washoe revived Jaimson as a topic, but of the man himself and his intentions Feeble Thomas knew nothing beyond what he already had told.

"But how came you out there, Feeble?" puzzled Washoe. "Immigrant trains now simply follow the stage road."

"I was looking round a bit for Sorry here," slowly replied Thomas, his eyes flickering an inquiring glance at his partner.

"Prospecting for silver on some tip Sorry gave you," ventured Washoe, concealing his amusement at the thought of one old desert rat heeding the lure of some yarn spun by a second old desert rat.

"Gold, not silver!" fiercely corrected Sorry Kane, his sunken eyes glittering and his thin beard bristling. "Gold, I say. Already mined. Just to be had for the picking up and packing on a burro."

With a little cry of dismay Thomas rebuked:

"Now you've put your foot in it! You'd better tell it all, or keep your trap shut."

"I ain't afraid of Washoe telling things," muttered Kane, yet glancing uneasily at the young man. "Even if he knew and wanted to git ahead of me he couldn't."

Washoe became very grave and said in a reproving tone

"Can you think that bad of me? My friends, even Kell Hawkins will take my word when I pass it, and he and his gang is waiting at Virginia to murder me."

"Not by a —— sight do we think bad of you, Washoe," hotly denied Thomas. "It ain't my yarn to tell. If it was, I'd take you in as a third partner. We need some one fresh and full of spunk."

Sorry Kane squinted his eyes at Washoe

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reflectively, then exchanged glances with Thomas.

"We've come to a decision," he solemnly announced. "Washoe, you shall come in as a partner. There's gold enough for all of us." And to the young man's growing amazement he began a weird recital of ancient civilizations and cities and possible treasure.

He pointed to the shelf of books and proudly said—

"It's most all of it to be found in those books."

THEN he resumed, most glibly recounting the efforts of Marco de Niza, the Franciscan monk, sent out by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado in the Spring of 1539 to discover the wonderful city of Cibola and its six sister cities and to "descry the country" thereabouts. His sunken cheeks seemed to fill out and his eyes to renew their youth as he told with much spirit of the gold ear-rings and finger-rings and other ornaments of the precious metal the inhabitants of Cibola were said to have worn. The houses, he reminded, were built of lime and stone, with gates and pillars formed of turquoise, and all utensils and vessels were fashioned of pure gold. Then the fire died from his eyes and the hollows in his cheeks reappeared, and he sadly concluded:

"But Father Niza was warned by a friendly Injun that his negro servant, Esteva, had reached the city of gold and had been put to death. Father Niza climbed up a mountain and saw the city, houses of stone, several stories high, but he didn't dare go near it."

"Cibola!" exclaimed Washoe in disgust. "That was down in the Gila River country. The coast is full of old Spanish yarns. Cities of gold, really 'dobe house, half-buried in the sands. I've heard about them ever since I struck Frisco."

"The kingdom of Quivira, in which was Cibola and the other six cities, was located in what now is the territory of Nevada," shrilly cried Kane. "And every Spaniard who entered the country brought back stories of wonderful cities and white people and dishes made of gold."

"Zuni Indians. Cliff dwellers. 'Dobe huts," sneered Washoe. "And always down in New Mexico and Arizona. *Not* in Nevada."

"In Nevada, I say," fairly shouted Kane, the flash returning to his melancholy eyes.

"He saw a part of a buried city," whispered Feeble Thomas.

Washoe wondered that two men could be mad with the same delusion.

" 'Dobe villages may be found in the desert stretches east of the White Mountains for all I know. Probably can be," quietly said Washoe. "But what of it? 'Dobe built towns don't mean gold. Can't you two men understand that no matter how many centuries ago the Indians built stone huts in this country they couldn't have gold unless they mined it? And don't you know the gold is over the ridge in California, and that here in Nevada it's silver, not gold, that brought the white folks in? The gold diggings at Gold Hill didn't bring a rush from over the ridge. It was *silver*. Tell me about a town made of *silver*, and I'll get interested."

Sorry Kane opened his snaggy mouth and leaned forward and tapped a finger on the young man's knee and softly said:

"Hold your hosses, Washoe. You're young. Even you don't know everything about this sage and greasewood country. Some years ago, when there weren't nothing but trading-posts in Carson valley, I come down the Humboldt River trail. I was in a rare hustle," and his voice quavered. "I was well-nigh finished."

"Indians," muttered Washoe sympathetically.

"Not Injuns," impatiently corrected Kane. His tone changed, and he craftily explained, "Something worse'n Injuns. But let that go. I quit the river road just before reaching what's now called Gravelly Ford. I struck south down the Smoky River valley with the Toiyabe range on my right hand. I was in a hurry and traveling light. I was keen to quit the valley of the Smoky and hit that four-foot ditch of water we call the Reese, but had to keep right on for fear there was Death racing along on t'other side of the Toiyabe range. One afternoon, near sundown, I fell flat in the sage-brush, panting for wind, my throat as dry as the sand. When I got to my feet I had this clutched in my hand."

And with a suitable pause so that the dramatic climax might have time to sink into the soul of the scoffer he reached his hand to one side and fished under some clutter at the foot of his couch and pulled

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out a buckskin bag. From the bag his trembling hands produced a rude circlet, big enough to pass over Washoe's wrist. Kane held it close to the candle light so as to reveal the crude workmanship. There was no mistaking its nature.

"Gold bracelet," conceded Washoe in response to the triumphant query in Kane's gaze. "Some Paiute traded for it in New Mexico. Or stole it, or found it on a dead Apache, who got it in Mexico."

"*All* right," complacently continued Kane. "But when I got to my feet it was to see a sand-storm was racing down on me. I shifted my course northwest to make the Reese valley, and just before the storm hid the sun I see the half-buried walls of an old city, only the top and half of the second stories showing; and I knew my bracelet was once worn by a man who lived in that city a long time before any white man came to this continent. I managed to get to the Reese River valley and to save my hide. Then I got through to California, where I met Thomas. Him and me have traveled together ever since."

Washoe shook his head stubbornly.

"This is a silver country," he insisted. "If that gee-gaw was made of silver it would show that the early people found a silver ledge and knew how to get the stuff out. You found this gold trinket. You saw what you believed to be an ancient town—'dobe houses. Maybe you did. Tribes escaping from the Spaniards came up north and may have built 'dobe towns. They would fetch along any gold trinkets they happened to be wearing. But it was in the afternoon, and the light was failing. And you may have seen rock formations, half hidden by the sand-storm. At a distance a lot of our rocks, even in clear weather, look like old castles and turrets and——"

"No, sirree! I saw what I saw! I fetched away what I fetched—a gold bracelet," passionately interrupted Kane. "I told Thomas all about it. He's been scouting back to Reese and Smoky valleys ever since. Before Gold Hill was named he was going up the Humboldt River road and prowling around in the valleys to the south trying to find that and other towns. But the sand-storm I see must have buried it. When he would run out of powder and lead he would hit back to the old Californy immigrant road and work as guide for some train. But we're going to find that gold city soon—some time. Lawd! But my heart come up in my mouth when Feeble come back and told about men striking it rich near Jacob's overland station. I didn't breathe free till he pulled out them Jaimson specimens and I see it wa'n't nothing but silver."

"Nothing but silver!" exploded Washoe. "Good heavens! It would assay three thousand to the ton! Possibly four thousand!"

Kane smiled complacently and suggested—

"S'pose you just figger out what a ton of pure gold is worth."

Thomas spoke up and anxiously remarked:

"You don't seem much interested, Washoe. And we've made you a partner."

"I'm not keen," frankly admitted Washoe. "But if I don't take a hand I certainly will never breathe a word of what you've told me to any living soul. I might put more stock in it if I knew why Kane, here, didn't go back and hunt for his lost town after the storm was over."

"I said I was in a hurry," mumbled Kane, his gaze growing uneasy.

"You was a Mormon, who backslid," suggested Washoe.

"No! no! Never!" hotly denied Kane.

"Sorry Kane never had any leaning toward the saints," affirmed Thomas. "Even if he had, there wouldn't be any call for him to be scared. This country was settled by Mormons before Brigham Young called 'em back to help fight Johnston's army in Fifty-seven. After Orson Hyde gave out the orders received from Salt Lake City there was lots of Mormons who were apostates and stuck here. Nor were they in any danger; for in Fifty-nine the gentiles from over the ridge come pouring in so thick that the question was settled for all time. So Sorry needn't have fretted any, even if he had backslid."

"I'm not trying to learn any secrets," Washoe earnestly assured them. "But I'll take it for granted that with the new conditions the old danger is removed. There's no reason now why Sorry shouldn't hunt for his lost city."

Sorry Kane sadly shook his head and answered:

"No. So long as I live it'll always hang over me. I might go among men everywhere and never stand in any danger. Or I meet one of few men the first time I quit

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this hole and bring death down on me."

"There are men in the territory now who could do you harm by telling certain things about you?" gently asked Washoe.

"Here in Nevada, and in Salt Lake City," shuddered Kane, sighing deeply.

He exchanged glances with his partner. The two had lived so long together that they seemed able to read each other's thoughts. Kane said:

"Thomas is right. It can't do no harm to tell you this much——"

"Tell me nothing if you can't trust me fully," broke in Washoe.

"I'd tell you all, so far as trusting you goes, boy," mournfully replied Kane. "But if you knew all it might fetch down trouble and death on you. I'll tell you this: Bill Mayfield used to know me. It's life and salvation for the two of us that he was drunk t'other day in Placerville, and that it was Feeble, and not me, he yanked away from the bar. If Mayfield recognized me it would be worth his time to name me to certain men. I went cold when he come into Roney's Place in Placerville. But I've aged and it was Thomas who was at the bar. I hope he won't know me from Adam now. Still I'm keeping clear of him. I thought the trail was broken, but within a year a man asked me questions that made me shiver. That was when we shifted our quarters down here and hid up in this old tunnel."

Washoe's manner changed. It was not the half-buried ancient town that was appealing to his curiosity, but the cause of Sorry Kane's lasting fear. It, obviously, was something connected with the Mormon hierarchy, and yet Kane, by his own tell, had never been affiliated with that church. Washoe essayed to comfort Kane by predicting:

"I don't believe you'll have to dread Bill Mayfield long. He's carrying on with too high a hand. Either he'll be killed, or he'll kill one too many, and then this territory will have a taste of the One Hundred and One days of California. I'll think over what you two have told me. If I can fit in and help corral some dust for the three of us I'll sit in gladly. Of course it would be easier for me to decide if I knew where all the cards lie."

He waited for a more complete revealment, but the two gray beards stared at him without speaking. He continued:

"As it is I must be thinking of my next move. You can see I already have given it some thought." And he flapped back his coat and revealed the two pounds and ten ounces of Samuel Colt's convincing invention, new navy model, caliber thirty-six.

From his pocket he took six prepared cartridges, wrapped in a water-proof covering, and informed:

"I have a hundred more of these, plus the caps. So you see I am loaded."

Sorry Kane stared with scant interest at this display of preparedness, but the effect on Feeble Thomas was quite pronounced. For a man who was widely known to be a coward his interest in the new gun was surprizing. He said:

"Sho! But one gun ain't enough when you're going against Hawkins and his crowd. Plenty enough for one or two men if you know how to handle it. But for a real crowd—no! Then there's Bill Mayfield and his men ahead of you. We heard him at Strawberry Flat when he 'lowed he must look you up. Bill always has a gang behind him on this side of the Sierra; and when you meet him you must be a two-handed fighter. Never count on less'n six shots in each hand in a crowd-fight. That allows for waste. Wait a minute."

"But I have my two derringers," reminded Washoe, keeping silent about his second belt-gun as he was curious to learn what the old man had in mind.

"Derringers!" And the old man spat in disgust. "And in a crowd!"

He went to his couch and fumbled among his humble belongings. When he reentered the candle light he had a worn belt and a revolver. Offering it to Washoe he said—

"Whatever that hits it stops. You're welcome to it as I never carry weapons."

Washoe took the massive engine of destruction, threw it down and covered an imaginary foe. It was like aiming a cannon.

"It balances well, Feeble. I like the feel of it. Where did you, a man of peace, get it?"

Thomas plucked at his beard and stared sorrowfully at the gun and explained:

"They used to belong to a he-critter of a man. He's dead. I come by it honestly. I reckon the owner *was* a man of violence at times, but he's gone over the Divide and we won't talk about him. It's a good gun, for the owner told me so. I never carry any weapons. Take it."

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Washoe passed back the belt and gun and said:

"I know it's a good gun. But I'll use mine. And I'm wearing two." He brushed aside his coat and displayed the holster under his left arm. "I may not need to use either of them. Hawkins may be glad to let the whole matter drop."

"Be honest," spoke up Kane. "Do you believe Kell Hawkins will let it drop?"

"No, I don't," frankly admitted Washoe. "He may pretend to——"

"And there's the danger," interrupted Thomas. "Sorry and me ain't lived here all this time without gitting an earful about every bad man in the diggings. I've seen dozens of them come and go. Some were upstanding in their cussedness and would stake their lives when they went out to make a kill. Others was as sly as cats stalking a bird. Hawkins won't fight you fair. He won't even take the chance that Bill Mayfield will when drunk. But his mind is as bloody as the worst of them. He'll shoot you in the back, or fix it so's there's a quarrel in public, with his friends forming the crowd. And they'll say you started it. When do you figger on going to Virginny?"

"I'll wait a day or two. I'm planning to make the town after dark. The trick is to arrive before they know it and have time to try any tricks: If I can take them by surprize I'll force a show-down. There's Hawkins and his friends and Mayfield and his gang. Two separate games I must sit in. Before it's known I'm in town I must close one of the games. That'll reduce the odds against me."

"You're biting off more'n you can comfortably chaw," muttered Kane. "Best move you can make is over the ridge till some one kills off some of the skunks."

"By this time the gang knows I paid my fare through to Sacramento. It'll help me take them by surprize. Can't we get out in the sun and smoke?"

"You can sit behind the blanket and look out, but it's too risky to be where some one will see you who knows you. When it gits dark you can stay outside all you want to."

Washoe knew this was excellent advice and he sighed in resignation. The tunnel and the rooms were dismal and depressing.

"All right. I'll only go as far as the blanket. If any one comes to look you up don't bring them inside."

Sorry turned a troubled visage towards his partner. Thomas quickly demanded:

"What is it, Sorry? What's gnawing at your peace of mind?"

"It's Bill Mayfield. I'm beginning to think he saw me in Roney's Place, and will, as soon as he gits half-sober, remember me. I'll stay behind the blanket with Washoe."

"He wouldn't remember you if you met him face to face in broad daylight and when he was dead sober," comforted Thomas.

But Kane continued uneasy and would not venture into the sunlight, although there was not even a wandering tenderfoot within sight of the tunnel's mouth.

Washoe sat with his head in the sunlight with Thomas ahead of him to watch out for strangers. Washoe found his thoughts drifting from his own affairs to dwell on his two companions. In common with others who had been some time on the Comstock lode he had accepted Kane and Thomas as eccentric, harmless characters—vagabonds. Every one who knew them called them "old". And yet they were not aged men. Washoe was discovering that instead of being aimless, homeless men, living entirely apart from the activities of life, each was reminiscent of a tragedy.

Kane's belief in the ancient city of gold and his unwillingness to search for it in person was sufficient in itself to pique one's curiosity. And it seemed that Bill Mayfield had been mixed up in his life some time and was now a menace to him. Washoe smoked his cigar and brooded over the puzzle until Feeble Thomas began a lazy résumé of Monte Cristo, giving it in the vernacular and forming his criticisms according to Western standards. For Feeble's benefit Washoe translated the count's expenditures into modern sums. Thomas removed his pipe and called out to Kane over his shoulder:

"Hear that, Sorry? Seems the count wa'n't such a —— of a cuss after all. 'Cording to Washoe's figgers he didn't blow in much more'n Lem Bowers will before he gits through with his and his wife's twenty feet of Comstock. Lawd, Washoe! Sorry and me was thinking those francs was so many 'Merican dollers!"

TO BE CONTINUED

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# THE INCORRIGIBLE

## *by* Larry O'Conner

I

OF ALL hard lives, the sailor's is the worst;
Toil—hardship—danger—little else beside;
Forever on the move, like one accurst;
His home—his war-bag; and the sea—his bride.

While the trade-wind croons to the tautened sail,
And the golden moon draws a silver trail
Through the waves that lap at the vessel's rail—
While the rosy east grows paler;
*He* sands the deck, or he scrapes the rail,
Or he lays aloft with a gummy pail
To tar the rigging, or take in sail,
And to damn the life of a sailor.

But *I* can't peddle ribbons all day long;
Silk shirts, and perfumes! Bah! They stifle me;
I'm lonesome in this senseless, shuffling throng;
I want fresh air, and freedom, and—the sea!

II

We'll say you go in steam—that's hell again;
Part stevedore—part flunky—and the rest
Dumb beast; to drudge your measured shift and then
Do "overtime" on cargo—"by request."

You wrestle freight in a fetid hold,
Or you coil down lines in the piercing cold,
While the Northern Lights roll, fold on fold,
And mock you for "fools" and "failures."
When the heat-waves blur in the sultry air
You're over the side, in a bosun's chair,
To scrape and paint, and to curse and swear
At the sea, and its ships, and its sailors.

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But I can't stand the shop's unceasing din;
The "chanting wheels of progress" madden me;
I want to feel the wind against my skin—
To breathe the salty fragrance of—the sea!

III

You turn to gas—that's worse than all the rest!
The stink—cramped quarters—grub that drives you mad!
A decent berth at sea's a hopeless quest;
There just ain't no such critter to be had.

You hit the banks with fishing-fleet
Where the wind blows the sea-boots off your feet,
And you battle with fog, and snow, and sleet
That would shake the heart of a whaler.
Or you follow the wily salmon's trails
Till your very soul seems caked with scales,
And you swear by all that swims or sails
You will ship no more as a sailor.

But I can't ride a pitchfork all my life;
The clover's fragrance don't appeal to me;
I want the scent of tar—the sense of strife;
Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?

IV

The poet sings of the starry night, and the low-swung southern moon;
But the sailor battles with Neptune's might, and the wrath of the mad typhoon.
The Southern Cross is a total loss to a soul by hardship calloused,
And a wave-swept deck breeds scant respect for the Rory Bory Alice.
It's tough to be on the boundless sea, with fire 'neath your battened hatches;
For there's little chance to court Romance while your skin peels off in patches.
You've small desire to invite your soul, or to drink in Nature's beauty,
Whilst you breathe the reek from a slimy hold, or pursue the lightsome cootie.
It's a hard, and a grim, and a thankless life; no profits, and little mirth;
It's a tough old game, but I'd swap that same for no other life on earth!

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# THE CURE

By G. A. Wells

*Author of "The Man-Hunters," "By Proxy," etc.*

DENNY CARR stood at an open window that looked out upon the front veranda of the big bungalow on Hallowell Island. At his right the broad stretches of the plantation, with the cluster of copra sheds, warehouses, barracks and other out-buildings squatting like toads at its edge near by. Three miles back a riot of jungle, held at bay only by the vigilance of the whites and the machetes and fire-brands of the black laborers.

Then beyond the rugged, serrated hills, lava-splashed by ancient subterranean vomitings, rearing tier on tier until they seemed to touch the sky, their higher peaks crowned by balls of fleecy clouds like puffs of smoke from Vulcan's forge.

On the left the sea, the far-reaching sea, that slipped up smoothly over the distant horizon to roll at last upon the beach, vainly assaying to quench the unquenchable thirst of the cocoanut palms that eternally flirted their high-flung fronds at the tireless trade winds.

And all bathed deep in the fiery rays of the overhead sun.

A pretty scene indeed; but Denny Carr's brain was not registering what his eyes beheld. He had seen it all thousands of times before, and long since the dull monotony of Solomon Islands landscapes had palled. His thoughts at the moment were upon the man in the room behind him, Dick Webster, his partner in the plantation venture on Hallowell Island.

Four years ago they had broken ground there and had first assaulted the virgin jungle. They had come out from the States with a joint working capital of fifteen thousand dollars.

And in spite of the many streaks of bad luck that fall to the lot of pioneers they had pulled through. Now acre upon acre of fattening crops showed the result of their toil and worry. They were, in very truth, at the crest of the hill, and before them lay Easy Street.

Then Webster shot his bolt. He had suddenly elected to return to the States from whence he had come four years before. Carr would not believe it at first; the very idea of Webster's going out now seemed unthinkable to Carr. Argument followed argument, Carr seeking to force his partner to confess that it was all a joke. Webster obstinately stuck to the original premise, however. Home he would go.

"It's nostalgia, Denny," was his chief contention.

But only when Webster began to pack his things would Carr be fully convinced. And that was what Webster was doing there in the room behind Carr now. He was putting the finishing touches to the larger baggage—trunks, boxes and the like. The more intimate grips and bags could wait yet a while, until a day or so before the arrival of the *Andromeda*, a small trading schooner that made some pretense of cruising about the islands on a regular schedule. She was due in ten days.

Webster purposed to board her for Apia, there to catch one of the Australian boats for the States. He was officially clear of Hallowell Island. Already he had Carr's check for ten thousand dollars tucked away



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in his purse, the amount for which he had sold out to his partner.

Carr wheeled from the window.

"Dick, you're a fool!" he said acrimoniously.

That wasn't the first time since Webster had announced his intention, that Carr had called him a fool. Carr was vastly peeved at his erstwhile partner.

Webster punched the end of a trunk strap through a buckle and pulled it taut and fastened it, then took a seat on the trunk and lit a cigaret.

"Maybe I am," he said quietly.

"A rotten quitter!" snapped Carr.

"I guess so, Denny."

Carr too lit a cigaret, and for some time they smoked in a silence broken only by the rattle and bang of pans by the house boy in the kitchen.

"Dick, I can't get this idea of yours," Carr said finally. "It won't penetrate. Just when we're safe out of the woods and ready to harvest our first real crop you quit. Don't the four years you've put in here count for something? Throwing them away—just like that."

Carr made a sweeping motion with his hands as if tossing an invisible something out the window.

"Oh, we've been over all that before, Denny," the other said with a trace of impatience. "It's no good; we could argue until the devil sprouted wings, and it wouldn't change my mind. Probably I am a bum to quit this way; but it's all I can do, Denny. It's nostalgia. I'm sick for the sight of something and somebody besides jungle and niggers. I'm homesick, I tell you, Denny, and I've got to make tracks."

"Tracks to where and to what?" Carr snorted. "Who'll be waiting for you on the dock when you walk down the gangplank? Not a soul. Neither of us have any near kin anywhere; that's one of the things drew us together and brought us out here. We're footloose, Dick, and there's nothing to take either of us back to the States."

"It's home, Denny."

"Home! What do you mean by home? A two-by-four room in a boarding-house? Of course, in a pretty large sense a man's native land is home, and he'd be a dirty dog to deny it, but—look here, Dick, is there a female in this anywhere?"

Webster shook his head.

"I'm not a woman's man, Denny; you know that."

"Then I can't see——"

"Neither can I, old man. As far as friends are concerned I won't be a bit better off back there than I am right here; perhaps not so well off in that respect. But—well, I'll be where I can mingle with white folks, and that's something. I'm sick of niggers. They're all we see here, except each other and the whites on the schooners that drop in, and they're as scarce as hen's teeth. And that Kaiserite over there on Gua-Gua with his one-horse outfit. Never a white woman."

"Ah, there you are!" cried Carr exultantly. "I thought it was something like that, Dicky."

"I told you I'm not a woman's man, Denny, and I meant it; but that doesn't mean that I don't like a sight of a white woman now and then. Good Lord! I haven't laid eyes on a white woman for three years. I'm fed up on the male of the species."

"Thanks," said Carr sourly.

"Oh, nothing personal, old man. Everything considered, you and I have pulled together great. You're a fine lad to know, Denny, and on your account I'll never regret the four years I've put in here. But I couldn't stick another year here with John the Baptist for a partner. It isn't so much my wanting to go back to the States, Denny, as it is wanting to get away from this place. I'm fed up, I tell you. It's like a barred cage and it's bred nostalgia in me. Nostalgia, Denny, like the monkeys have. I'll never again see a monkey in a cage that I won't feel sorry for him. But let's don't talk about it, old man. It does no good."

"Suppose you take a year in the States and come back, Dick?"

"No, I'm going for good and all, Denny. I'll get in something back home."

Carr turned to the window again. He flipped the butt of his cigaret away. Suddenly he reached for the glasses that hung by a strap on a nail beside the window and focused them upon something seaward.

"We're after having visitors, Dick," he announced presently, without taking the glasses from his eyes. "And guess who?"

"Who?" asked Webster, getting up from the trunk and joining the other at the window.

"That animal from Gua-Gua—Schlosser.

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At least that's his schooner heading in, and of course he'll be aboard."

"Glad he's coming, Denny. It's a chance to tell him good-by."

"Thought you didn't like him."

"Nor do I. Who does? But now I'm going away I feel in a forgiving mood. If I were staying on I guess I'd go on disliking him the same as everybody else."

Carr lowered the glasses.

"Well, I'll assume your dislike for him and add it to mine, Dick, and that ought to amount to a first-class hate," he laughed, then at once his face was serious. "The less that fellow comes here after you're gone the better I'll like him. Too much snake about old Amiel Schlosser to suit me. Never see him I don't fancy a snake crawling through the grass. Bet he'd bite either of us with half a chance, though he professes undying friendship. Some pretty rotten tales of him going the round of the islands."

"I suppose you mean that killing business last year, eh? I guess that's been stretched a bit," said Webster palliatingly. "Three niggers missing at the count when he runs a batch of time-out boys back to their island, and it gets out that Schlosser bumped 'em off out of pure cussedness and tumbled their bodies in the drink. If he killed the niggers——"

"He did; he admitted that."

"I suppose he had good and sufficient reasons."

"Not according to the story the other niggers told at the inquiry. They claimed Schlosser killed their comrades just to try out a new rifle. Popped loose at 'em while they were laying round forward. And that's plain murder, Dick. I'm astonished the commissioner didn't do something about it. Gave him a public reprimand and let it go at that, and an hour after court had Schlosser at the Government house drinking with him. Can you beat it?"

"You'd have had the commissioner hang him high and dry on the evidence of the niggers, eh? The commissioner did exactly right. I wouldn't believe a nigger on any account, Denny. You can't depend on 'em. We've had enough experience with 'em to know that. I'll admit Schlosser isn't a tin saint, and neither is he as black as he's been painted. Give a dog a bad name, you know."

"Hello!"

Carr uttered the exclamation when he had replaced the glasses to his eyes for another look at the approaching schooner, now not more than a quarter of a mile out from the beach.

"A woman, Dick, or I'm a dub!"

"Eh? Let's have a peep, Denny."

Carr surrendered the glasses to the other.

"A woman is right," said Webster after a few moments of looking. "Rather a girl, Denny, by the cut of her. Hm! Now I wonder where old Schlosser picked her up? There goes the anchor."

"Com'on, Dick, let's go down and do the honors."

Webster hung the glasses back on the nail and together they walked down to the beach to receive their visitors. By the time they reached it a cutter had been lowered from the schooner and was coming ashore. They could plainly see Schlosser and the girl in the sternsheets. Four kanaka boys were handling the oars.

In the bow of the cutter was another man, who, even at that distance, showed himself by certain unmistakable features to be a Melanesian, thus of a low order of humanity. He was as black as the ace of spades and had a face that looked for all the world like a baboon's.

"Dick, doesn't that look to you like that chief's son from Choiseul?" said Carr.

"The nigger in the bow? It is. I'd know that ugly mug anywhere. His daddy wouldn't let Schlosser have any Choiseul boys for the Gua-Gua plantation unless Schlosser took Mariau along to see that they were well treated. You see, the chief knows Schlosser's reputation. That's Mariau, all right."

"I understand Schlosser and his royal visitor are rather chummy," Carr commented. "Thick as thieves. Well, that's to be expected; they're a good deal alike in natural instincts and inclinations. But I wish old Amiel had left his nigger at home. Makes me sick to look at him."

The cutter grounded about thirty feet from the water's edge, and greetings were exchanged between Schlosser and the two men ashore. At a sharp word from the German one of the kanakas took the girl in his arms and waded ashore with her, Schlosser and Mariau following, and set her dry-shod on the beach.

"Chentlemens, my niece, Miss Louise Vatson," Schlosser introduced in his broken

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English. "Louise, you shouldt know dos chentlemens vot I dell you apout, Misters Carr and Vebster."

The two men doffed their hats and in turn took the dainty hand the girl proffered them. She murmured their names and gave each a smile that displayed dazzling white teeth.

She was an unusually pretty girl, this Miss Louise Watson, niece of old Amiel Schlosser. She was not more than twenty-three, blue-eyed, slender and graceful, plainly cultured and well-bred.

"Uncle Amiel has done nothing but talk of you since I came to Gua-Gua three weeks ago," she told the partners. "So he insisted that I come over and meet you personally. A hundred miles is quite a distance to travel to meet one's next-door neighbors, isn't it? I hope I haven't interrupted your spring house-cleaning."

She laughed gaily.

"We have never been known to clean house on Hallowell Island," grinned Carr.

"We shave now and then, but that's about all," Webster put in. "Fortunately both of us shaved this morning, else you might have thought us a couple of beachcombers. We get quite disreputable here at times with no women about to watch our steps for us."

"Oh, you elemental men," the girl chided. "Women are of some use to men after all, aren't they?"

"Besides sewing on buttons and starching collars," Carr laughed. "But at that, we don't wear collars here, as you can see."

"What a beautiful place!" the girl cried, looking about her. "Uncle Amiel, it is prettier here than at Gua-Gua."

"I dink so, Louise," Schlosser admitted. "Dese two Yankee poys haf got enderprize. Yess. Dot pungalow he iss von castle on der Rhine. Vot?"

Schlosser grunted a throaty laugh.

He was not a nice man to look at, Schlosser. There was a good deal of the beast in him; that much could be seen at a glance. His face was heavy and glowering, and small eyes shifted nervously under thick brows. The full beard he wore did not hide a pair of cruel-looking lips. If he had not deliberately murdered the three blacks he was reported to have murdered, he at least looked capable of the crime.

"But come up to the house out of the sun and let's see if we can't find something to settle the dust in our throats," invited Webster after a few more commonplaces had passed among them.

"Yes, come, Uncle Amiel. I simply must see the inside of that pretty bungalow."

"Py der vay, Denny, I pring dot Mariau poy along dis drip," said Schlosser with a wave of his hand toward the son of the chief of Choiseul Island. "He come from dot Choiseul like your poys und he dell me he like to visit mit some of his friends here vot come from his village. You haf no opchections, Denny? No?"

"I guess it's all right, Amiel," answered Carr with some reluctance. "Send him up to the barracks. The noon bell will go before long, and he can see his friends when they come in to dinner."

The German spilled a mouthful of orders to the black in his own lingo, a tongue that neither Carr nor Webster understood. The partners had always used *bêche-de-mer* in addressing any of the more than one hundred contract laborers from Choiseul on their plantation.

Mariau grunted, gave Carr a quick glance from bloodshot eyes, and strode away toward the barracks to the right of the bungalow. Webster and the girl were already half-way to the bungalow, both of them talking animatedly, and Carr looked after them with a smile.

"You're not a woman's man, eh, Dicky?" he chuckled to himself. "All right, we'll see, my son. I rather like the looks of her myself, but if she'll be the means of keeping you here I'm king's-X on her."

Schlosser gave his kanaka coxswain orders to return to the schooner and call for him and the girl again before sundown, then he and Carr started for the bungalow to join the others.

"Amiel, tell me something," Carr said.

"I dell you anyt'ing you vant to know."

"How come an old reprobate like you is the uncle of a nice-looking girl like Miss Watson?"

"Ah, you young vippersnapper! So you iss schmitten mit dot leedle girl alreaty? Dot vas quick vork, Denny. Yess."

He slapped Carr on the back and laughed noisily.

"She's a stunner, Amiel," Carr said by way of extenuation of his admiration.

"Dot she iss," agreed the German. "She iss my sister's leedle girl, Denny. Her mamma und her papa been deadt a long

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time. Her mamma tie last und she make me Louise's guardian. Vot you say, Denny, if I dell you dot ven her mamma tie she leaf dot leedle girl so rich py two hunderdt t'ousandt tollars? Yess. It iss in drust for her in dot San Francisco pank. Amiel Schlosser iss her only kin, und if she tie dot money she come to him. Vot you say to dot?"

Carr looked at the man curiously.

"I'd say your niece is a very fortunate young lady," he said. "But of course you wouldn't have your niece die so that you could inherit the money, Amiel."

Schlosser threw up his hands in mock horror of the idea.

"Gott forbidt!" he cried. "Nein, Denny. She iss too bretty to tie, dot leedle lamb."

"But you haven't said a word about Gua-Gua, Amiel," Carr changed the subject. "How are things moving over there? Got those pineapples set out yet?"

ABOUT eleven o'clock that night Carr and Webster foregathered in the dark of the front veranda to smoke their good-night cigars. Schlosser had intended that he and his niece should live aboard the schooner during their stay at Hallowell, but the partners had insisted that they be their guests at the bungalow. Webster had surrendered his room to the girl and Amiel took the one spare room the bungalow afforded, and had ordered some of their things brought ashore from the schooner.

It had not been a difficult matter to persuade Miss Watson to remain ashore, for there is a vast difference between the spaciousness and comfort of a bungalow room and the restriction and inconvenience of a stuffy cabin aboard a small schooner.

"Well?" said Carr when the two men had their cigars going and they were leaning at ease against the veranda rail.

"Well?" returned Webster.

"What about her, Dick? You've been with her constantly since they landed this morning. Did she tell you anything about herself?"

"A little," answered the other. "She's a regular thoroughbred, Denny. Schlosser's about as much fit to be her uncle as I am to be Pope. Talk about pearls before swine."

"Amiel tells me she's worth two hundred thousand, Dick."

"That so? I gathered that she was pretty well fixed; she didn't name the exact amount. Schlosser's her guardian."

"He told me that. Her guardian; mark that, Dick. Not the guardian of her money. That goes to show that Amiel's sister had her own ideas about Amiel. Probably if he had had control of the money it would have been sunk long ago in that money-eater over there on Gua-Gua. I can't understand why he hangs on there. He's not cut out for a planter anyhow. He should have been an animal trainer at Hamburg; he's the right type for that work."

"You're prejudiced, Denny."

They smoked in silence for a space. The riding lights of the schooner shone brightly, like near planets, and a glowing moon hung in the sky.

"She told me she's been at school in the States up to six weeks ago," Webster spoke again. "Graduated from the University of California. She's never been in this part of the world before except to go through on a steamer years ago when she was a child. Been living in the States for the past fourteen years. She has no near relatives there, so when she graduated she thought she'd run out here to visit with her uncle a while. A devil of a place for a college-bred girl, Denny. But I'm certainly glad she came before I—pulled out."

The last two words were added with a tone of doubt, as if there was nothing certain about his pulling out. Carr caught it and chuckled to himself.

"Now don't go falling in love with her, Dicky," he bantered.

Webster said something under his breath that sounded a good deal like an oath.

"Don't be an ass, Denny," he growled. "Does a man fall in love with a girl he has known less than a day?"

"It's possible, my boy."

"Hm! Well——"

Webster suddenly walked away to the end of the veranda and stood there looking off into the night, then came back, Carr threw away his cigar and yawned.

"Think I'll roll in the hay," he said. "Good night, old man, and pleasant dreams."

Webster grunted a response and walked away again. Carr went to his room and prepared for bed. He did not go to sleep for perhaps an hour and lay listening to the soft footfalls of his late partner as that person paced to and fro along the veranda. Carr grinned at the ceiling.

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"Oh, no, Dicky, you're not a woman's man," he said to himself. 'You're a girl's man, eh, you sly duck? Heaven help you, Dicky! When men like you fall for a skirt they fall hard."

AT THE end of five days Dick Webster knew beyond any doubt that he was head over heels in love with the pretty niece of Amiel Schlosser. And if he read the signs aright he had an idea that Miss Louise Watson was not altogether indifferent toward him.

Relieved now as he was from extensive participation in the business affairs of the plantation, Webster found lots of spare time to devote to social events; principally to entertaining Miss Watson. They were much together. Every morning there was a plunge in the artificial pool the partners had put in the first year of their residence on Hallowell Island. Horseback jaunts about the big plantation or long walks up or down the wide-curving beach occupied the afternoons. In the evenings music and bridge with Carr and Schlosser.

Day by day Webster became more enamoured of the vivacious Louise Watson, much to the delight and satisfaction of Denny Carr, who thanked his lucky stars for the advent of Amiel Schlosser's pretty niece.

It was the afternoon of the sixth day following the arrival of Schlosser and the girl that Webster and she, at Carr's request, rode over to the far right-hand corner of the plantation to see how a gang of about forty blacks were getting along with the task of pushing back the jungle with their machetes.

Webster and the girl were in the thick of a grove of tall banana plants, their horses' hoofs making scarcely a sound on the velvet-like loam. They had fallen thoughtfully silent. There are such moments in the lives of those who love when the slightest noise seems a sacrilege. Somewhere ahead, however, sounded the drone of a voice, growing louder and louder as they advanced.

Suddenly the riders burst from the grove into a lane about fifty feet wide that ran the entire length of the plantation on that side. At the farther edge of the lane the jungle stood hostile, challengingly. Webster pulled up his horse with a jerk and the girl did likewise.

On the ground before them squatted a wide circle of blacks, naked save for bright colored kilties or loin cloths. Each man had a machete. In the center of the circle stood Mariau, son of the chief of Choiseul. It was the voice of Mariau they had heard droning. Now he was silent, staring at them resentfully, his thick lips half open as if their abrupt coming had halted his speech in the middle of a word. His face, evil enough in repose, was doubly evil now. It was murderous.

"You, Garoomi!" Webster snapped at the man in charge of the gang. "What name you black fella boys loaf along this fella job? Fella boys chop-chop along bush same time fella bell ring. What name you black fella boys loaf no fella bell?"

At the crack of the white man's voice the blacks came to their feet as one man, and Webster noted a tightening of grips on the handles of the machetes. Garoomi, the man addressed, looked first at Mariau, then his eyes turned uneasily to Webster's face.

"Fella boys plenty tired chop-chop fella bush long time sun he come up," he answered.

Webster shot a critical glance at the jungle behind the blacks. There was evidence enough that the men had been at work, but such evidence was not sufficient to convict them of breaking their backs. The presence of the girl forbade Webster speaking his mind. Mariau, he somehow knew, was the responsible party, and he bored him with angry eyes.

"You fella Mariau belong this fella gang?" he barked.

"No belong," was the surly reply.

"Then what the —— are you doing out here interfering with the work of this plantation? Excuse me, Miss Watson. You fella boy no belong this fella gang chop-chop no business stop along this fella gang. What name, eh? Plenty cross along you, Mariau. Make trouble along you if you don't come close up them barracks plenty quick. Garoomi, you fella boy get back chop-chop. Jump!"

Garoomi did jump, and with him all his gang. He spat orders, striking at the nearest with the flat of his machete blade. The big knives began hacking at the jungle again. Grumbling was quite audible, however, and more than one fierce glance was sent Webster's way. But Webster did not mind their glances.

"You fella boy Mariau!" he snarled at the visitor from Gua-Gua. "You come

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close up them barracks plenty soon, eh? No belong out here. Now scoot!"

He raised a hand and pointed in the general direction of the laborers' barracks three miles away. His other hand rested upon the butt of the revolver in the holster of his belt. Carr and Webster had learned early in the game that it was safer to go among the blacks with a weapon.

Mariau seemed inclined to ignore the white man's order. He knew that the eyes of the other blacks were upon him. It would be quite a feather in his cap, so to speak, if he could flaunt Webster to his face and get away with it.

Webster knew the blacks; he had an idea of what was running in Mariau's mind. With the white man in the Solomons it was rule or get out. There was no middle course. Slowly the revolver crept from the holster. Mariau eyed it narrowly. He would have been a fool indeed had he not seen by the cold glint in the white man's eyes that when the revolver came clear of the holster it would speak. Mariau also knew white men.

Therefore, even to the savage, discretion is often the better part of valor. When the black muzzle of the revolver showed at the edge of the holster he hesitated no longer, and with an angry grunt strode away into the banana grove. Webster's face relaxed, and the revolver dropped back in the holster.

"You're terribly abrupt, Mr. Webster," said the girl with not a little of reproach in her voice as they rode on up the lane toward the other end of the plantation five or ten minutes later.

Webster gave a little laugh.

'Well, I should hope I am abrupt when I speak to niggers," he said. "It's a case of push, Miss Watson. We simply can't be gentle with the niggers here; they are absolutely indifferent to gentleness. In fact, soft treatment gives them the idea that you are afraid of them, and it isn't safe to let them get that idea in their heads. That old saw, 'give some people an inch and they'll take an ell,' applies with a vengeance here in the Solomons. Every laborer on this plantation is a Solomon islander and a savage to the core."

"Coming out, our ship stopped at Honolulu two days," the girl said. "A missionary there told me that the natives are quite civilized."

'Humph," said Webster scornfully. "He no doubt meant the natives of the Hawaiian group, Miss Watson, or possibly the Polynesian division generally. And that is true to a great extent among the Polynesians. But he couldn't have meant the Melanesians."

"Oh, aren't the natives all alike?"

In spite of himself Webster smiled at the girl's utter ignorance of the peoples of the Pacific.

"I should say not," he answered. "A Polynesian is one thing; a Melanesian entirely another. You'll find people who'll tell you that cannibalism, head-hunting and that sort of thing is a relic of the past in the Melanesian groups. Those people don't know what they are talking about. Ask some of the traders down here what they think.

"Some of the native tribes in this neighborhood are as much addicted to cannibalism as they ever were, especially in the Solomons and the Bismarck Archipelago. I don't say all tribes, remember; perhaps not a majority of them. But they exist. I'll venture to say that there isn't a black man on this plantation who doesn't relish his 'long pig.' That's native for human flesh, Miss Watson."

As he said this Webster gave the girl a sidelong glance and saw her shudder. Not a pleasant subject of conversation for a girl fresh from the States, Webster well knew; but if Miss Louise Watson were going to sojourn in that part of the world any length of time she had as well learn a few facts now as later.

"Thus you see, Miss Watson," he went on, "these blacks, being what they are, they are utterly incapable of appreciating kindness. The whites must rule; and they are forced to rule with an iron discipline, else there wouldn't be any whites. Suppose I had let that nigger Mariau override me back there a while ago. It would have set a bad example. I couldn't, for Carr's sake, back down once I had taken my stand."

"But possibly the poor fellow was only telling his comrades a story," she suggested. "Story telling, you know, is a trait peculiar to the aborigines. They never tire of hearing their tribal legends and traditions."

Webster chuckled silently to himself. Evidently his companion had read armchair history. It amused him.

"You may be right," he said doubtfully.

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"I didn't hear what Mariau was saying, and wouldn't have understood if I had. At any rate, it must have been tragedy, to judge by his expression. I saw murder in that black face, Miss Watson, as sure as we're alive. But whatever it was he had no business coming out here and interrupting work. His place as a visitor is at the barracks. I can't understand why your uncle Amiel brought him over from Gua-Gua."

"Uncle Amiel is very much attached to Mariau, I think."

"Yes, I've heard so," said Webster.

WHEN Webster, with the girl, got back to the bungalow late that afternoon he found Carr waiting for them on the veranda. Carr appeared very much perturbed about something or other.

"Dick, I wish you would come to the office with me," he said right off. "I want your opinion about those patent copra-smoking furnaces we were speaking of the other day. You'll excuse him, Miss Watson?"

"Surely," the girl assented. "Is Uncle Amiel here?"

"He rode up the beach about half an hour ago and hasn't returned yet," Carr answered. "All right, Dick."

Carr led the puzzled Webster along the veranda to the office, and they entered. Without a word he threw open the door of the gun case and looked at Webster. Webster caught on at once and whistled softly. The two rifles that the case should have contained were gone, as also were the several small boxes of ammunition that generally stood on a shelf at the bottom of the case.

"The ——!" Webster ejaculated. "How come, Denny?"

"That's what I want to know," rejoined Carr frowningly. "I left the bungalow shortly after you and Miss Watson did and didn't get back until almost four o'clock. I brought my revolver in here to put it away in the case and found the things gone. I distinctly remember that they were here when I got my revolver, and I distinctly remember that I locked the case before leaving. They disappeared while I was away, Dick. You can see there's nothing wrong with the lock, so it must have been picked."

"Sure you didn't leave the key in the lock, Denny?"

"Positive. The lock was picked, I tell you."

"Who do you think did it?"

"I wish I knew."

"Probably one of those thieving niggers. Who was here when you left?"

"Schlosser and the kitchen boy. Amiel was on the front veranda smoking when I rode away, and he tells me he didn't hear anybody back here. He slept in his chair about an hour, though, he says. I questioned the kitchen boy, and he doesn't know anything about it either;—— funny, I say."

Webster studied the floor.

"I wonder if Schlosser's nigger knows anything about it?" said Carr at length. "That nigger's here for no good, Dick."

"I don't think Mariau got 'em, Denny. That is, he didn't actually steal the rifles, if that's what you mean."

"I saw him prowling around closer to the bungalow than he had any right this morning."

"But you say the rifles were here when you left this afternoon," Webster said. "When Miss Watson and I rode away from here, Denny, we headed straight for Garoomi's gang out there. We found Mariau there holding some sort of a conflab with the niggers, so you see he couldn't have taken the rifles himself."

Carr gave Webster's face a searching look.

"What for was Schlosser's nigger out there chinning Garoomi's gang?" he asked.

"I don't know, but I'll bet anything he wasn't talking about the weather. Listen, Denny."

Forthwith Webster related what he and the girl had seen earlier that afternoon.

"There's something in the wind, Denny," he finished.

"Looks that way," agreed the other.

Suddenly both men started and leaped out to the veranda. Several shots sounded somewhere up in the plantation. They thought they heard cries also, but were not sure. Then all was still again, and the two men looked at each other for several long moments.

"Dick, with those rifles loose out there, you'd better get Miss Watson out to the schooner right away," said Carr grimly. "And as a measure of precaution I'll break out that box of dynamite in the bottom of my closet and put in some fuses. I'm satisfied the dynamite is still there, because you and I alone know about it."

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"Better split the fuses and put in match-heads, Denny," Webster advised as they re-buckled their revolvers about their waists. "We'll have to make it snappy; it'll be dark in half an hour."

Webster darted away down the veranda toward the front of the bungalow and around to the girl's room on the other side, where he knocked on the door loudly. Her voice answered him at once.

"That you, Uncle Amiel?" she called.

"No, it's Dick. Come to the door, please, Miss Watson."

In a moment the door opened.

"Why, what's the matter?" the girl burst out, noting Webster's serious face.

"We don't know—yet," Webster replied. "Nothing, I hope. You heard those shots?"

'What were they?"

"I can't tell you that, either. But someone has stolen the rifles from the case in the office, Miss Watson, and when such a thing happens it often means trouble with the blacks. You've got to go out to the schooner until we get the straight of things."

"Is Uncle Amiel going too?"

"He hasn't shown up yet, but you needn't wait——"

"Hey, Dick, come here!"

It was Carr's voice hailing from the other veranda.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," Webster called over his shoulder as he started away to answer Carr's summons. "Be ready and I'll take you out to the schooner myself."

He found Carr leaning over the rail of the side veranda, his revolver in his hand, watching the stumbling approach of a black man coming out from the plantation. When the man came closer they recognized him as Garoomi, the gang boss whom Webster had reprimanded that afternoon. The man staggered to a point directly beneath the two white men and stopped, panting noisily. His hands were clutching at his stomach.

"Sing out, you fella Garoomi!" cried Carr. 'What name you come close up too much? My word! You no tell 'm plenty quick——"

"Big fella Mariau, chief fella boy, he come bime-by plenty kill white marster," Garoomi broke in.

His voice was thick and uncertain, as if his mouth were stuffed with mud, and the two men on the veranda were hard put to understand what he said.

"Plenty close up," the black choked on. "You savee? White marster along Gua-Gua close up that fella Mariau. Plenty kill. One, two time shoot this fella Garoomi he no come close up kill 'm white marster. You savee? White marster plenty finish bime-by along that fella Mariau. Sun he go down——"

The black's speech was clipped short off by a grimace of pain and he bent almost double. His hands were clawing fiercely at his stomach and wheezing noises came from his throat. Then the white men saw what had before escaped them. Blood trickled from between Garoomi's fingers, and down his groins ran two broad splotches hard to see against the black skin.

"Shot!" ejaculated Carr.

He vaulted the rail and landed with a thud on the ground eight feet below, but before he could lay hands on the black that worthy crumpled to the ground stone dead.

"Oh!" came a low gasp of fright from behind Webster.

He wheeled to see the girl standing at his elbow, her eyes wide with horror.

"Here, you get out of this, Miss Watson," said Webster severely. "We're going out to the schooner. I don't like the looks of this."

He caught her arm and led her away and noticed that she was trembling violently.

'I won't go without Uncle Amiel!" she declared with a stifled shriek. "I positively will not leave poor Uncle Amiel here to be murdered by those terrible men! I won't! I won't!"

The girl was bordering on hysteria. Webster patted her shoulder soothingly.

'Uncle Amiel's all right," he tried to reassure her, though he had little assurance of Schlosser's safety himself. 'Possibly he went on out to the schooner without coming to the bungalow and is there now."

'I won't go until I know!" the girl sobbed. "Poor Uncle Amiel!"

'—— Uncle Amiel!" growled Webster under his breath, for if Schlosser hadn't brought Mariau to Hallowell Island this would not have happened.

Twilight in the tropics is a name rather than a fact, especially on or near the equator. The girdle of the fat earth, whirling swiftly eastward as if to escape the torture of the scorching sun, plunges the land from an almost full daylight to the darkness of night in a trice. And even as

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Webster pleaded with the obdurate girl the darkness came down.

"I think you'd better stay here now, Dick," said Carr, climbing the front steps to the veranda. "No telling what you'll run into down there on the beach. Take Miss Watson to her room, then come back here and help me throw these steps down so they can't get up this way."

TIME passed. Carr opened the face of his watch and probed the hands with his finger tips. It was ten minutes after eight. Not a light showed anywhere about the bungalow. Only the stars and the riding lights of the schooner were visible. It was a little too early for the moon, which was waning from full. Much as the two men wished to smoke to take the edge off their taut nerves they did not dare. A lighted cigar-end makes a fair target in the dark.

For two hours steadily they had been tramping the veranda, every sense alert, their ears straining to catch the least sound from the darkness. A revolver swung at each man's hip. At each man's breast was suspended a carpenter's apron, and the pocket of each apron held a dozen or more sticks of dynamite, ready fused with two inches of protruding fuse, the tip of each fuse holding a matchhead. In his left hand each man held a small block of wood with a strip of sandpaper tacked about it.

The dynamite was their chief weapon of defense. The cylinders of their revolvers contained all the ammunition they had, as the rest had disappeared, and when that was gone all was gone.

The veranda extended about the sides and the front of the bungalow and the bungalow itself perched in the air on piles eight feet high. The only natural means of mounting to the veranda had been the steps in front, and these had been removed.

Carr sentried the veranda on the landward side and Webster the other on the seaward side, and every few minutes they met about the middle of the front veranda. They wore no shoes, but walked their posts in bare feet to avoid all noise.

The girl was in her room, the doors and windows closed and locked. Her nerves were stretched to the breaking point. Nothing had been heard of Schlosser. She listened for sounds of his coming, and as he did not come she moaned and wrung her hands.

"Hellish, Dick!" snarled Carr in a whisper once when the two men met at the joining of their posts. "Pretty clever him stealing the rifles and hiding them under the mattress of his bed. At that, I'm —— glad the niggers didn't get 'em. Trying to clip our wings, the devil!"

"He did," whispered Webster. "The rifles are no good without the ammunition, and we couldn't locate that. He was too wise to let the niggers have the rifles, Denny."

They parted and made the turn of their posts and came together again.

"Hellish!" whispered Carr again. "I remember his voice sounded funny when he told me he'd get the money if anything happened to her."

"He calculated to make it happen!" growled Webster.

"Brought his nigger over here purposely to preach revolt to our boys and stir 'em to wipe us out, and the girl with us," Carr said. "Our heirs would have sold this place to him for a song, too. Pretty clean sweep for him, Dick, if he could have put it over. He may yet."

"Thank God for Garoomi!" muttered Webster fervently.

"Yes, thank God for Garoomi!" echoed Carr just as fervently. "Never tell me again a Solomon Island nigger can't show gratitude. That time I saved Garoomi's life, Dick; you remember? And he showed his gratitude by staying loyal to us. ——! Talk about stamina, Dick! Two bullets in his guts, yet he comes a mile to warn us. Yes, thank God for Garoomi, old man! I wouldn't have believed a Solomon Island nigger had it in him to— What name, there, eh?"

This last was flung snarlingly at a slight sound that had come to Carr's ears from a point directly before the front veranda and about forty feet distant.

The answer was the spat of a revolver and the whirr of a bullet that smacked into the wall of the bungalow. Carr's revolver leaped from the holster and sent two quick shots toward the spot where the other weapon had flashed.

Something wet struck Webster on the shoulder and glanced off. He did not know what it was, nor did he have time to investigate, for immediately following Carr's

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fusillade the night was rent with a chorus of fiendish yells.

'Swing your partners!" cried Carr, the Irish blood of him singing joyfully at the prospect of a fight. "At 'em, Dicky!"

A matchhead flared and out from the veranda streamed a train of sparks that struck the ground and burst with a frightful roar. And at that moment a huge red moon seemed veritably to leap into the low eastern sky from under the horizon. Its light, though pale, was yet sufficient to show the white men what they were up against. A bunch of possibly eighty naked, screeching savages were on the hop toward the bungalow, brandishing their deadly machetes as they came.

"They don't know the steps are gone yet, Dick, and it's a front attack!" yelled Carr. "Get 'em early before they spread to the sides!"

Matchhead after matchhead was rasped alight against the sandpaper, and the trains of sparks that soared out from the veranda looked like miniature comets. And each little comet as it exploded with an earsplitting crash worked its destruction. The bungalow rocked like a ship in a gale. And out where the little comets crashed a revolver spat sharply, but the bullets it hurled missed their marks.

"Climb down out of that, you nigger men!" screamed Carr.

Directly under the veranda rail a dozen or so blacks had gathered and were getting in each other's way trying to claw up one of the supporting piles. Carr struck a matchhead and dropped a stick of dynamite in their midst. He was nearly thrown from his feet by the resultant explosion. The pile was splintered and at that point the veranda sagged a few inches, but held.

A black head appeared at the rail within a yard of Webster, and a long arm swung a machete at him. He ducked and shot the man down with his revolver. Another head appeared and he shot that down. He aimed at a man on the ground and pulled the trigger. The hammer snapped. He dropped the empty revolver and went to his dynamite with a will.

The roaring of the dynamite was now almost continuous. Where the sticks dropped geysers of flame leaped up, tearing black bodies asunder and hurling the parts to the four points of the compass.

Mere flesh and blood has its limits of endurance. The blacks began to fall back. Mariau, for the first time plainly recognizable to the white men, waved an empty revolver and snarled at his comrades, urging them to the attack.

Carr struck a matchhead and gave his arm a quick fling. The stick of dynamite exploded squarely between Mariau's feet and he was no more. The rest broke and fled wildly and in a few moments had disappeared.

"Glory be!" gasped Carr, swabbing the perspiration from his flushed face with a sweep of his shirt sleeve. "Short and sweet, thank God! This is what I call the strenuous life, Dicky. Let's have a couple of sticks of sick'em. Used my last stick on that Mariau nigger."

"I have but one stick left, Denny," panted Webster. "You'll have to go to the box. Gosh! Say, I wouldn't have missed this for a dollar, but I wouldn't go through it again for a million. Think they'll come back, Denny?"

"Oh, yes. They'll stay out the rest of the night and come in for breakfast. They've had enough until next time, I think, and there's no Mariau to lead 'em. But we'd better stick around, old man. Keep an eye while I go get some more ammunition."

"I didn't see anything of Schlosser, did you, Denny?"

"No. Guess he was behind the lines, protecting his dirty hide. Be back in a minute."

Carr started away and suddenly stopped. Webster heard him ejaculate under his breath.

"'Smatter, Denny?"

Carr thrust a foot into a deep shadow near the veranda rail and kicked something out into the now rather bright moonlight.

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed Webster.

The object was the head of Amiel Schlosser, neatly severed at the bearded jowls, the eyes of it staring glassily at the moon.

Carr uttered a cynical laugh.

"I wondered where Mariau got that revolver," he said. "It was Amiel's. He fell into his own trap, Dick. Mariau double-crossed him as he was trying to double-cross us and his niece. A white man's a white man to a nigger, and they couldn't resist the temptation when they had him out there alone this afternoon.

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They threw his head up here to scare us."

"So that's what hit me on the shoulder," Webster said with a shiver.

"Mariau figured to wipe out Schlosser too while he was at it and take the gang over to loot Gua-Gua after he'd looted us."

"Is—is it over? Is Uncle Amiel back?" came a tearful voice from the darkness of a near-by room. "Oh, please, somebody come and talk to me!"

"Hide it, Denny, for God's sake!" whispered Webster tensely, and hastened around to the door of the girl's room.

BY DAYLIGHT the most gruesome evidences of the fight had been removed. Carr risked pulling out to the schooner to bring some of the kanaka crew ashore to help bury the dead, including the bodies of Schlosser and Garoomi. They found seventeen dead blacks, and about a dozen others too badly wounded to move of their own accord. Other wounded had no doubt gotten away. Carr ordered them to the barracks and attended to them.

As Carr had predicted, the insurgents came in about sunup and sent one of their head men to the bungalow to extend the olive branch. Carr made the best of it and granted a general amnesty with certain provisions. Webster joined Carr in the office about nine o'clock.

"I've told her, Denny," the former said.

"What did you tell her, Dicky?"

"That her uncle is dead, and that he had been killed by the blacks while trying to fight his way in to help us," replied Webster. "What she doesn't know won't hurt her, Denny."

"I hoped you wouldn't tell her the truth, old man," nodded Carr. "What's she going to do?"

"She's going home as fast as she can get there. She was scared stiff by last night's performance. Quite fed up on the South Seas."

There was a silence. Carr drummed softly on the desk with his fingers. Webster twisted the slip of paper he held in his hands.

"Well, old man, I think she'll make a good wife," said Carr finally.

"Wife!" Webster fairly shot the word from his lips. "Nothing doing, Denny. I thought I was in love with her. It was a mistake; I was merely fascinated. My wife is going to be a red-blooded woman, a fighter. You heard her whimpering in there all night. She'd be a fair-weather wife, Denny; she'd shy at storms. She'll board the *Andromeda* for Apia alone."

"Eh?"

"I'm sticking on here, Denny, old boy. After what happened last night I couldn't leave you here by yourself to get things running again and keep 'em running. And I wouldn't want to go back home and find many women like—well, weak women, Denny. I'll marry old Dame Nature here on Hallowell. She's a tough old bird, but she's got enough spunk to fight back like ——. Nostalgia's disappeared, Denny. Here's your check if you don't mind."

"I don't mind a —— bit."

As Carr ripped the check to pieces he fought hard to down the impulse to jump up and crack his heels together.

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# GRIGGSEY HELPS OUT

By Gerald Humboon

YASSIR, sailor, she suits me pretty well! Not but what I've seen better submarines, and cleaner—'way back when Leo Welch had the old F.

What? Well, I was just statin' one little fact. You war-babies ain't got the instinct of how many night-watches a Navy yarn ought to last.

Yeah, as I was sayin', the 32-boat is all right now; at least she's better'n when she got young Griggs from the submarine school.

Now look here, you infant son of a deck-swab, if you runs across my bow with any more remarks about me bein' looney, you're goin' to get knocked for a long row of little tin coops! We-e-ell, all right, then. Just take a reef in that jaw of yours and I'll prove to you in about ten minutes that one Griggs, which was a radio key-tapper in this here U. S. N., done that 32-submarine one —— of a lot of good.

A sea-pig is the same as any other packet in this man's Navy, and that means she's as good as the flat-foots what mans her. If old Bill Westerman was still at the Newport finishin' school for young gobs, you done heard about the old New Jersey's crew what painted "Hell Ship" all over her sides, 'cause why? 'Cause the skipper wouldn't let 'em shave their fool heads when they was in Cuba for three weeks and further wouldn't provide the sharks with no four o'clock tea by lettin' them go swimmin' at Guaycanayabo.

All right, then—the 32 had exactly the same amount of bone per head in her crew, and said bone sure did stick out when last August's draft from New London came in to the Sub. Base. "How come?" you says. Well, just rig out your listenin'-gear.

Y'see, the 32 had been one of these "plank-owner" boats. Every gob on her had been aboard so long that they thinks that when they leave they ought to be allowed to take along at *least* one of her main motors. Everybody on her knew the boat so well that they'd stand around and criticize among themselves whenever the second officer dove the old bucket.

Then, as I remarks previous, this new gang arrived, and they was so green that they still had all ten toe-nails sound and secure on their lily-white feet.

That started the split-up, and things jumped right along, 'cause the Old Man got sent back to put a new boat in commission and what does he do but pull the ropes so's he took most of the old gang with him.

The skipper what relieved him was all right but he had a bad luck record that didn't help none, and here he was stuck with a few dumb-bells out of the old crew and this bunch of young plow-pushers. I reckon I was the only man left what really knew the boat, and you know what that means when you got about a million battle-practices to pull off.

Sailor, I'm here to remark in loud and raucous tones that in just one week by the clock that boat was all shot. Havin' been taught the gentle art of submarinin' in them old turtles at the sub. school, that new bunch acted like a bloomin' set of firemen tryin' to sail a whale-boat. They flooded her wrong, they pumped her wrong, they stood her on her nose, they jimmed up her engines, and had the whole Base "howlin' in unholy glee" as Shakespeare says. Hunh? Who in —— did say it then? Gwan! Don't interrupt me with that line of hop.

About a month later, when things was settlin' down again, with the 32 leadin' the division in bumness, dirtiness et cetera, who should pop aboard but friend Griggs.

Now I'll say right here, bo, that the sub. school's pull with me dropped just 114% when I sees that little bleary-eyed white



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mouse ease aboard. The brains of that school must have been on a seventy-two hour liberty when he was sent to any sea-pig, let alone this one.

Yellow? Why, he'd make a canary bird with the jaundice wilt from envy. The very next day I hears "Spudface" Malone call Griggsey a string of names what would have made Bergdoll fight the Germans, and what does our manly hero do but grin like a sick sheep and take it.

Also, the amount he knowed about submarines is just about on a par with his nerve. He savvies Diesel engines and motors like them citizen kings of California savvies that Japs is good for their pocketbook. Accordin' to Griggs, he's bein' supported by a kind Government so's he can get Babe's latest home run by wireless. But it was that same soft job of radioman what brought his lovely career to a head.

Seems like every time the boat dives, he, not havin' any pressin' duties at the time, stands in a corner of the control room and watches everything like a hawk. First, he gets a kick like a slug of home brew out of watchin' the boat's nose dip 'way down as she starts under, and from then on till we come to the surface he's all up in a sweat. Honest, the way he jumped, every time anything was said or done, it reminded you of a frog gettin' an electric massage.

Did it wear off? It did not. Each time we dove he got worse, and pretty soon he started to get everybody's goat. Of course, Bunny Jenkins, the leadin' petty officer, tries to take it out of the little skunk by extra work—like curry-combin' the bright-work and caressin' the inside of the torpedo tubes with grease—but you couldn't notice him losin' any of his parlor tricks.

You'd have thought he'd been too scared of the crew to keep it up, 'cause by this time they was all givin' him the royal red razzberry, but nossir! He just started his daily shimmy from the knees up the minute he heard the divin' signal. And would you believe me, some of them longshoremen started to get some of his symptoms.

You know, lots of these high-brows has it that everything a bird does or thinks is because he's close up to somethin' that gets him that way. For instance, I've saw lots of corn-fed gobs get spliced with some skirt which was simply a manufacturer of apple-pies or the et cetera like the ones he used to get in his Aunt Ella's mansion in Troy, Mo.

Now, I'll say there's somethin' in that idea, 'cause didn't I see about six of Uncle Sam's pampered pets turn cream-colored from bein' near that yellow kid, Griggs?

And you can't blame 'em—when you're divin' every day with a guy which bounces clear up into the conning-tower anytime he hears air roarin' out of a tank, pretty near anybody is goin' to start trimmin' his finger nails *a la* teeth. No, I don't blame 'em—even if they did nearly bump me off.

Speakin' of air roarin', I reckon this compressed air was about the biggest failure on the boat as a source of quiet enjoyment to our handsome Mr. Griggs. Which it ain't to be called soothin' to the shattered nerves when a relief valve pops loose, but ——, it ain't nothin' to make your heart jump out and clank on the floor plates, neither.

I guess, right up to the day when Griggs finished things, that the skipper was tryin' considerable hard to get him off our hands, but the transactions didn't go through with the lightnin' speed of the Sinn Fein conference, so the followin' mess couldn't be helped. The 32 was runnin' along submerged one morning, with everything goin' so sweet and quiet that not more than half of these rookies is havin' their manicure, when we hits the worst thing you can find in this sea-pig navy, which is a streak of fresh water.

"What t'——?" you says. Well, it seems to me it oughtn't to take a great amount of brains to see that if anything is balanced in salt water so's it don't go neither up or down unless you push it, then that there object is goin' to be a —— sight too heavy in *fresh* water.

Why? A-w-w, ask the skipper. All I know is that I can float a whole lot better in salt water than in fresh. Anyway, there you are. We was runnin' in a perfectly good salt water bay and crosses the mouth of some fool river, and we starts for the bottom, not goin' much faster than one of these express elevators.

Man, I'll tell the cross-eyed world that we was travelin', and for once in his life young Griggs had all the right in the world to be scared—and he held up to expectations!

When a educated whale starts for China via the bottom of the ocean, and the depth gage goes forty, fifty, sixty feet, like the second hand of a watch, and keeps on going,

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it ain't no parlor enjoyment whatever. I didn't see Griggs leave his happy corner in the control room, bein' as I was saunterin' around the boat like a scared jack-rabbit, carryin' out a few thin-lipped remarks of the skipper's about blowin' all ballast tanks clear of water to make her light enough to quit this nose-dive stuff. But "Bunny" Jenkins seen him go and finds time to whisper to me that Griggsey shook a lot of dust out of the steel floor-plates on his way forward.

Why forward? God knows! The minute I hears that, I starts wonderin' why, and I still am. He knew all our compressed air bottles is somewhere forward and that the least little jar may jolt the connections off them, and let enough air into the boat to supply the disarmament conference, and incidentally enough to squash the insides of us with the pressure.

Yessir! I was wonderin' all that, even while I was shapin' up my lips to say "Hello, Saint Peter," 'cause I'm tellin' you that after every darn bit of ballast was blown out of that boat she was still goin', and gettin' nearer to crushin' pressure every second.

The skipper was doin' everything he could, but I still believe we would have gone on down forever if it hadn't been that the manufacturer of this locality had slipped up and left a lot of nice solid rocks lyin' around at the depth of one hundred and fifty feet. And oh, boy! The first news we get of said bottom is bein' thrown over in a corner upside down and hearin' a sort of gratin', screechin', roarin' noise all around; then a screamin' sort of a hiss that sounded like a hundred steam engines lettin' off steam at once. I remember gettin' a grip on a stanchion and sayin' over and over:

"Take it easy, old kid. Take it easy."

And that hissin' and roarin' gets worse and worse, and my lungs starts all feelin' swelled up, and there's streaks of pain shootin' around—my eardrums was already about to bust—and I suddenly gets the fact that the air roar had dimmed.

Well, we all lies there, blinkin', and the Bunny he looks at the depth-gage and sees it goin' up. And the air-bottles had busted—*and* we was still alive!

Speakin' confidential, kid, I was a little bit disappointed—havin' been all set to bump off, and I just sits there and watches that depth-gage go around. But the skipper runs forward and comes back a minute later all calmed down and orderin' us to our usual stations.

He says for the sake of my wonderin' baby stare that the thing that saved us was the fact that somebody had closed the big heavy door into the air-bottle room from the other side and must have killed hisself instantly to save the rest of us. Yeah! I thinks right away to myself—Griggsey.

Well, brother, that's all there is to it. We had one awful time gettin' that boat to the surface real easy-like so's the pressure inside would leak out of that bum room gradual, instead of punchin' a big hole in the hull, but we did it and, moreover, got her to the beach in time so's when all the air was out and the forward part of the boat filled with water we shoved her nose up on a reef and saved the whole blinkin' affair.

Of course it *was* Griggsey up forward, and the rest of the crew got so much second-hand glory from bein' shipmates with the dead hero that they takes a brace and makes a darned good boat out of her.

But long before the boat is patched up they sent me down in that compartment to get Griggs' body. Now, if you ever spill this next dope to anybody you're going to get *spurlos versenkt!* If Griggs had closed that door he would have been right beside it, and he wasn't. He was under a torpedo, fifteen feet away, and couldn't have been two places at once—now could he? I don't suppose folks ever think of a door bein' able to slam shut of its own accord and bein' held tight by the pressure behind it.

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# THE BENDER FAMILY

*by* **E. A. Brininstool**

IN MARCH, 1871, there was living about two miles south of the little town of Cherryvale, Kan., a family by the name of Bender, consisting of the father, William Bender, about sixty-three years of age; his wife, about the same age; a son, John, about twenty-seven years old; and a daughter, Kate, twenty-four years of age. The men were rough and uncouth, and the daughter was a heavy, coarse-featured woman. All bore an unsavory reputation. The Benders lived on the main-traveled road in a small frame house and pretended to run a sort of road-tavern.

Kate Bender professed to be a spiritualist who could cure deafness, blindness, fits, and also heal other ailments.

In the Spring of 1873 a Dr. William York, who had been to Fort Scott on professional business, started for his home at Independence, Kan. He did not appear there, however, and some weeks elapsed, during which time relatives and friends began a search for the missing man.

Various persons were called on with a view of getting a possible clew as to his disappearance; and the Benders were visited among others. They claimed to know nothing about the missing physician. Tremendous excitement was created during the hunt for Dr. York, rivers being dragged and the surrounding country closely inspected.

Two months elapsed. Finally one of the searching-parties while passing the Bender place noticed that the house appeared to be deserted. An examination disclosed that some livestock in the rear of the house had died from inattention. Suspicion was aroused, and the Bender property was carefully searched.

In the orchard a depression in the lately tilled soil attracted attention. The ground was dug up, and the badly decomposed body of Dr. York was revealed. The skull had been crushed and the throat cut from ear to ear. Further examination revealed seven more bodies, all with crushed skulls and gashed throats.

When the house was examined a sickening stench was noticed. A trap-door was discovered in the floor, disclosing a pit six feet deep, and much clotted blood was found at the bottom. Further examination of the house brought to light the following facts:

Cloth partitions divided the room used for eating purposes. The table was set in such a position that the person to be served sat with his back touching this cloth partition. Behind this curtain one of the Benders was stationed with a heavy stone-breaker's hammer, which, at an opportune moment, would crush the victim's skull. The body would then be dumped in the pit and the throat cut. After dark the body would be buried in the orchard.

A man named Wetzell, of Independence, then stated that he had suffered from neuralgia and had called on "Dr." Kate Bender for relief. A friend named Gordon accompanied him. Wetzell told of being asked to dine, and of their chairs being placed close against the curtain. Old man Bender and his son had then suddenly disappeared.

For some reason Wetzell and Gordon left the table and stood at the counter for their meal, at which Kate Bender suddenly grew abusive. Then Bender and the son appeared from behind the curtain and went to the barn. The two men grew suspicious, jumped into their buggy and left.

The sudden disappearance of the Benders was ample proof of their guilt, and they were supposed by most persons to have escaped into Mexico. The story given by an old buffalo-hunter named Cook was that the Benders were pursued by a posse of Vigilantes, captured and all shot to death and their bodies sunk in the Verdigris River. At any rate they never were again seen alive.

The chief of police of Cherryvale, in 1910, when questioned, stated that the Benders' wagon was found riddled with bullets, and that the inquirer "could guess the rest." At Independence it was announced that a posse had been sent out and had returned with the information that "it was no use to look any further for the Benders."

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# The GRAY CHARTERIS

FOUR-PART STORY
CONCLUSION

Robert Simpson

*Author of "The Other Allingham," "Gilford the Gifted," etc.*

***The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.***

ON THE banks of the Benin River in the Niger Delta were sprawled the buildings of Marsden & Co's. trading-factory. Across the way stood the decrepit establishment of the only rival in the vicinity, which belonged to Bart Jardine and his daughter. A distance down-stream rotted what was left of a concern once known as Grandison's, and it was to this latter beach that Charteris, a man with silvery hair and the face of a youth, came, appearing no one knew why or whence.

At the same time Hugh Morrison, owner of Marsden & Co., arrived in his yacht with his daughters and servants to look over his agency and investigate the circumstances surrounding a disturbing quarrel between two important native traders, Agwala and Abado. His visit had not lasted more than a few days when, one pitchy night, as he paced the deck of his boat, Mr. Morrison was done to death by a mysterious assailant, and immediately the neighborhood of whites and blacks was thrown into an uproar. Every effort was made to determine the murderer, and, during the proceedings of inquiry, suspicion fell upon every one from the puzzling stranger, Charteris, to Noni, Margaret Jardine's negro maid, and next Abado—who had incontinently vanished during the confusion. But even Morrison's own daughter, Elsie, was subjected to a grilling, and it was her nervousness and bewilderment that created a new air of suspicion and served to complicate the whole affair all the more.

THE examination continued, but little light was thrown on the situation. Gradually, however, there grew up a feeling that the gray man knew more than he cared to tell, and it increased when mysterious goings-on at Grandison's beach were reported. Word was brought that Charteris was sheltering Abado there—a fact which naturally pointed to a double implication in the recent murder.

Mr. Parker, the Government commissioner, and all those associated with Marsden & Co. concentrated their efforts toward verifying the rumor and then apprehending Abado. They solicited the help of Agwala, who was only too pleased to comply. Charteris, however, having other plans in mind, managed to keep them all guessing. Thereupon Mr. Parker decided to use force as a last resort and set about preparations for an armed visit to Grandison's.

Meanwhile the trade at Marsden & Co. commenced falling off. On the other hand, there was a sudden flurry of trade at Bart Jardine's across the way. And this phenomenon was strange enough to appear importantly connected with the already unpleasant tangle of events.

BUT Catherine, Morrison's eldest daughter, resolved, on her own account, to make a few investigations concerning her father's death. Accordingly, she went in the company of a government official to Grandison's beach to catechize Charteris and find out whether Abado were really hiding there. But the gray man still proved too clever, and she had to go away without learning anything.

Immediately afterward, Charteris hurried off with Abado for a conference with Chief Roku at Dowadda. Suspicion was already strong in the white man's mind that Agwala was at the bottom of a good deal of the trouble, and he was all the more convinced when, during the palaver, an assassin attempted to put Abado and himself out of the running. Thereupon Charteris, to indulge his private beliefs, set out for Agwala-town in company with his two protégés and the would-be murderer, fully determined to bring matters to an issue at once. On their arrival they were surprized to discover Catherine Morrison and MacGregor, the Morrison agent, haggling over trade terms with the fat chief. The result was a scene in which the gray man officiated, first by accusing and manhandling Agwala and second by humiliating MacGregor when the latter tried offensively to interfere.

*"The Gray Charteris," copyright, 1922, by Robert Simpson.*



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The unwelcome guests then departed, leaving behind plenty of causes for a storm which promised easily to break soon on more than one head—white and black.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### "SOF'LY, SOF'LY"

ONI stepped unostentatiously down into the hulk's shop saloon when she saw Agwala heading in her direction.

There were only two or three small bushel traders in the shop at the time, however, and Noni's presence became known to Margaret immediately. So, after studying the girl's rather feeble assumption of obscurity for a minute or two, she called her over and asked quietly:

"What's matter? You fear?"

"Sof'ly, I beg you, Missy Cap'n, sah," Noni muttered tremblingly with a furtive glance in the direction of the companion stairs. "Agwala come."

Margaret's eyebrows lifted. She knew her father had next to nothing left to sell.

"Nonsense! And suppose he come, he no want to look *you*."

But Noni knew better than that. Two days before an emissary of Agwala's had requested her presence at Agwala-town the previous evening, and with more decision than the casual observer would have credited her with, she had wisely stayed away.

And though Agwala, when he did arrive at the hulk, spent the better part of an hour pretending to talk trade with Captain Bart Jardine, this simply proved to Noni how important she was in Agwala's scheme of things and that he would send some one in search of her before he left.

Presently a swagger young Jakri who wore a straw hat, a green and yellow blazer, a trailing overcloth that had bars of music arranged higgeldy-piggeldy in its design, came jauntily into the shop swinging a cane.

He sneered impassively at the shop's emptiness, lifted his hat politely and with proper humility to Margaret, then said to Noni quietly—

*"Wah!"*

The word meant simply and briefly "Come!" Noni instantly huddled closer to Margaret and for once there was no answer upon her ready tongue. Margaret could feel her tremble and a single sharp glance into her face decided the matter.

"What you want?" she demanded of Agwala's swaggering messenger.

"I come talk to Noni," smoothly. "Be Agwala send me. He like talk to Noni li'l bit."

And he jerked his head in the direction of the deck to indicate that Agwala waited there.

Noni's fingers gripped Margaret's blouse sleeve. There was a terror in that silent supplication that would not be denied.

"All right. Noni busy now. Tell Agwala come down here if he wants to talk."

Obviously the messenger did not like Margaret's interference. Neither did he care for the task of delivering her message to Agwala. It was not good to return to Agwala with no for an answer.

He hurled a sudden stream of Jakri gutturals at Noni's head, and then, just as abruptly, swung out of the shop and up the companion stairs, swearing violently as he went.

Noni continued to hold on to Margaret's sleeve, and even when Agwala had gone without accepting Margaret's invitation to visit the shop, the girl went about her duties for the remainder of the day as near to her mistress as she could possibly manage.

But not a word of explanation as to why she was so afraid.

SLEEP did not come easily to Margaret that night. It was past midnight when, with her father's stertorous breathing coming faintly to her ears from one of the adjoining deck cabins, she finally allowed her wakeful dreams to drift away from her.

She did not sleep with her door closed. Only a simple hook and staple held the outer screen door fast, and when the first wild screech of terror that raised the hulk into a bedlam broke riotously in upon her slumbers, there was almost nothing to prevent her hearing it.

It was followed immediately by another and another. Then there came a pause, a few leaden seconds in which the world seem to wait on tiptoe with its mouth open. And from somewhere not far distant from Margaret's door there came a whining sob of pain that trailed itself out unmercifully,

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almost as if the anguish it expressed was a source of enjoyment.

Margaret thrust aside her mosquito curtain, drew on a pair of mosquito boots that always stood beside her bunk, slipped her hand under her pillow and donned a light dressing gown in something under ten seconds.

She lifted the hook on the screen door and stepped carefully, but without a moment's unnecessary hesitation, out on deck.

A moving shadow hovered near the rail, directly on line with the hand crane that stood near the hatch of the afterhold.

"Who's there! Talk! I shoot!"

"No shoot, Missy Cap'n, sah," came the plaintive answer. "Be me, Noni."

The tension slackened considerably and Margaret's revolver hand lowered slowly to her side.

"What's matter?" she demanded sharply. "Who make holler?"

"Be me," apologetically, "I cut man head plenty too much. I think so he done die."

Margaret paused, and the hurried patter of Kroo-boy feet from the fo'csle came excitedly nearer.

"Where are the watch boys?"

"Please, Missy Cap'n, sah, we heah."

And two rather scrawny Kroo-boys, whose knees knocked together almost audibly, emerged cautiously from behind the crane, one of them swinging a hurricane lamp. The other had lost his or been deprived of it.

"What is it? What's all the racket? Ain't I got a right to know what's happenin' on my own ship?"

With his pajamas tucked into his leopard skin mosquito boots, Bart Jardine's lanky figure injected itself to the accompaniment of much rancorous questioning from the arriving Kroo-boys.

No one paid much attention to Jardine, but when the stolid Kroo headman had questioned the two watch boys, and Margaret had flashed the light of the hurricane lamp on two sprawled figures on the deck, it was known that a night attack of a frankly murderous nature had been made upon the hulk; that one of the victims was a Kroo watch boy, and that Noni, who slept on a camp bed which she erected on deck whenever the mood pleased her, had arrived upon the scene with a machete and had struck down one of the attackers.

That she had "cut him head plenty too much" there was not the least doubt. Margaret did not care to verify the fact a second time. Furthermore, Noni's blow had evidently put an end to the matter, and the marauders had fled.

One of the watch-boys—the one who had lost his lamp—said the attacking force numbered "ten—twenty." The other reduced the total to "pass five," but Noni, who appeared to know a great deal more about it than she cared to admit, said there were only four and that the dead watch-boy had wounded one of them.

"I don't think they savez we got so plenty watch boy," the girl suggested meekly, and moved shudderingly away from the things that lay on the deck.

Amid the vengeful growling of the Kroo-boys, the babble of questions from night-prowling canoes, and her father's endless explanation of the matter, Margaret sent a messenger to the *Bonny* advising Malkett of the affair as she understood it.

In less than half an hour, the Great Dane himself climbed the hulk's companion ladder. Malkett, he said, had gone up to Sapeli for a few days.

The moment the provincial commissioner made his appearance, the Kroo-boys shuffled sullenly back to the fo'csle—all save the headman and the two watch boys who had participated in the fight.

Captain Jardine, after several attempts to draw Parker's attention to his captaincy and to his ownership of the vessel involved, subsided into a state of mumbling indifference and finally retired to his cabin. In less than five minutes, he was sound asleep.

When the Great Dane had made a minute study of Noni's victim, and after he had interrogated the girl and the watch boys all over again, he drew Margaret aside and said briefly.

"I'm afraid I'll have to deprive you of your maid."

"You mean——"

"Oh, no, she isn't at all culpable. But she's not saying enough."

Margaret nodded slowly. She felt just a little "swimmy" again, and now that the first flare of the excitement was all over, she knew that she was very much afraid. Parker, however, did not realize that.

"Do you know who he is?" she questioned and the Great Dane did not have to ask to whom she referred.

"No. Just a Jakri in his working

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clothes—" this meant a loin-cloth—"and when your girl hit him, she must have been concentrating on the job. Do you happen to know of any reason why these fellows should have come here?"

Margaret shook her head, then all at once, stopped.

"I wonder—but I suppose it couldn't possibly have any connection with that."

"With what?"

"Well," in a low voice. "Noni has developed a sudden and most unusual fear of Agwala. He's her mother's brother, you know. And when he came here today and wanted to talk to her she sneaked down into the shop beside me and used me as a sort of buffer between herself and him."

"I see. And what happened?"

"Nothing. Agwala went away without seeing her."

"There may be something in that," Parker admitted. "But don't let me deprive you of sleep as well as a maid. I'll see that these—" and he jerked his head aft —"are officially removed before I go."

"Oh, thanks, I——"

"No, no," Parker reproved gently, and quickly caught her arm. "Nothing like that. I'll carry you if you don't stand up."

Margaret's whole weight leaned gratefully against the Great Dane's shoulder for just a moment. Then, with a truly valiant effort, she drew away and laughed.

"All right. No fainting. I'll tell Noni."

And as she found her way to her cabin again and leaned against the door jamb and convinced the fearful, shivering Noni that she was in no immediate danger of being hanged even if she were taken to the yacht, the only thing that kept Margaret upon her feet was a kind of ritual that repeated itself over and over again:

"I can't faint. I can't! Sandy thinks I'm a heroine!"

And this, to Margaret, was the biggest joke in the world.

IN THE ladies "dormitory" on the yacht, Elsie slept undisturbed. Catherine stirred restlessly, but did not wake up. Fran, however, was leaning upon the rail near the companion ladder waiting for the government launch to come back.

Noni's screams had spanned the breadth of the black and silent river, although by the time they had reached Marsden's beach they were rather faint and had not been heard by any one save the watch boys.

Fran, who had not been sleeping at all heavily of late, heard them distinctly. Then the faint jabbering of excited native tongues came out of the blackness of the river, and after a while there was a low-toned jumble of voices on the yacht's deck. The puttering of a launch followed, and Fran had hurriedly appareled herself and tiptoed from the "dormitory" to try to discover what it all meant.

The officer of the watch did not know. So she waited without any thought of sleep, for the return of some one who did.

Fran Goddard liked the dark. Even the dull, unemotional face of the bush had become kinder in her sight because of her shrinking dread of the brazen light of the tropical sun. And as she looked up and down the sullen river that, night and day, was in such feverish haste to reach the sea, the corners of her sensitive mouth twitched, and a quick, eager look came into her eyes.

Almost immediately, however, the eagerness died out and something that was akin to hopeless resignation took its place. She left the rail with a gesture of impatience with herself and began pacing the deck, clenching her hands into small knots of almost vicious determination.

Then, she heard the launch coming back, and she was standing at the head of the companion ladder when the Great Dane stepped on deck with Noni.

"What's wrong? What's she been doing? Has Margaret——"

"Just a little rumpus on the hulk," Parker said patiently, though he had hoped to avoid the necessity for explanations. "Miss Jardine is in no danger."

"Oh, thanks. That's all right, then. I had a vision of another murder."

Parker laughed to save himself the inconvenience of further conversation and led Noni off toward the library. Obviously the girl was not happy. But Fran scarcely gave her a thought. So long as no one had been murdered, there was no cause for alarm.

The Great Dane, unfortunately, was not of the same opinion, particularly after he discovered that, even with Bark's assistance, Noni was no more inclined to be informative on the *Bonny* than she had been on the hulk.

When he asked her how it happened that

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she had arrived so opportunely to take part in the fight, when every one else save the watch-boys were asleep, she answered simply enough:

"I 'wake. I no fit to sleep. I hear fight palaver and I go dere. I cut man head when he go cut Kroo-boy. He fall down. I holler one, two, three time and all man go 'way. Dat's all."

She did not say why she could not sleep, nor how she happened to find a machete so ready to her hand, and not once did she mention the name of Agwala.

Parker also refrained from bringing mention of the chief of Agwala-town into the discussion and when he had invited Bark to inspect the shrouded body in the launch, Arthur also appeared to be equally at a loss as to the deceased's identity.

Whereupon, simple obsequies were performed, and, having placed Noni in safe custody till the morning, the Great Dane whispered an extra word of warning to the officer of the watch, then crossed the deck to where Fran's small, sleepless figure was curled in a huge Madeira chair.

"Don't you think you'd better go back to bed?" he suggested in a low voice.

"I suppose so. Is the excitement all over?"

"Every bit of it."

"What was that you dropped into the water from the launch a little while ago?"

Parker hesitated.

"You have quick ears," he admitted grudgingly. "I thought you had gone to sleep in the chair."

"Somebody did get killed then? A native?"

"And a Kroo watch boy," Parker added significantly. "But there is no need to keep awake all night on that account."

Fran slapped at a mosquito and uncurled herself out of the chair. Parker found her standing rather near to him looking intently up into his face.

"You're a decent sort," she said distinctly, after an unconscionably long time. "And Cath's the squarest woman I know. But I hope you'll have sense enough to give her —— from the start."

Parker gasped and drew back a step.

"What on earth——"

"Oh, don't be an ass," impatiently, and without the least display of diffidence. "Cath isn't half the snob she pretends to be. But she does need a hiding every now and then, and I think you'd make a good master of ceremonies."

Then Parker grinned; and thereby rose to the occasion.

"Thanks. I'll remember that. You—you're a queer little beggar."

Fran's mouth tightened, but her eyes did not accept or reject the doubtful compliment. She moved slowly backward toward her sleeping quarters.

"All wrong. I'm not a bit queer. It's you and Cath and the rest of you who are such funny fools. You spend so much time in pretense, you haven't any left for the real thing. The way you play at it, life isn't an etching. It's a cartoon."

Then she left him without even the formality of a "good night."

Parker retired to his camp bed just aft of the bridge, stroking his chin in some confusion. And among the things he did not think about at all, was the circumstance that the "queer little beggar" was soundlessly crying her tired and shaking little body to sleep.

Fran could not remember when she had done it before.

## CHAPTER XXV

### STRIPS OF CLOTH

THE following day was Sunday. But this did not restrain Parker from requesting the presence of Agwala at the "conference" on the *Bonny*.

When Bark returned from Agwala-town, however, his report was to the effect that the ponderous chief had gone to Siluko and would not return till Tuesday.

The interval was filled largely with speculation. Hogmanay and Parker held brief and somewhat staccato conversations on the subject after numerous insignificant natives had made secret reports to them both.

Catherine watched the river for hours on end and said very little. Fran kept out of the sun as much as possible without being in the least ostentatious about it. Elsie, quietened somewhat by the vague sinister atmosphere that seemed to surround every one and everything, became more and more amenable to the protecting arm of Tommy Dillingworth.

Noni-of-the-little-feet preserved a discreet and fearful silence and regarded Arthur

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Garriman Bark's uniform with a dull kind of hopelessness that occasionally expressed itself in a savage, feline fury. Arthur kept as far away from her as possible. He gave the impression that he was gingerly walking on eggs and that he had a perpetual chill between his shoulder-blades.

And the dull, dead green of the endless bush told nothing at all. Neither did it invite investigation. Calm, unchanging, implacable, it asked no questions and it answered none.

Behind the curtain of its silence anything might exist and nothing be revealed. Life seethed and scurried and slithered and groped within its darkened walls; life that fed ravenously on life, eternally voicing the destroying curse that lay upon the land.

AGWALA arrived at the yacht on Tuesday afternoon.

Malkett had come down from Sapeli in the morning, and Hogmanay, the moment he saw Agwala's canoe heading for the *Bonny*, made it his business to invite himself to tiffin.

Margaret was already there, both officially and unofficially, together with the two watch boys who had played a part in the defense of the hulk.

Agwala's appearance was bloated. His eyes stared a little, and the shiny polish had departed from his skin. Apparently he had heard nothing of the attack upon the hulk until his return from Siluko that morning.

From the Great Dane's standpoint, the "conference" was nothing more than an impressive fraud, arranged for the principal purpose of bringing Noni and Agwala face to face.

He knew that both of them were lying and that Arthur Garriman Bark was playing ducks and drakes with his duty to the government because of a perfectly natural fear of Agwala's long and vengeful arm.

Parker knew, also, that direct evidence against Agwala, upon any count whatsoever, was listed among the things generally believed to be beyond the limits of possibility.

Margaret, the two watch boys, Catherine and Hogmanay were in the little library when Noni was brought in by Malkett, and Margaret in particular had a good view of the girl's face as she confronted Agwala.

"*Doh*," Noni said simply, and, without even a hint of the terror that gripped her so tenaciously, she descended upon one knee before her huge relative and made obeisance in the customary native fashion.

"*Doh*," Agwala returned, and his expression was a round and complacent mask.

And that was all.

Margaret looked at Noni in staring unbelief. A flat and deadly sense of disappointment fell upon the little group of watchers, and the investigation proceeded thereafter with a decided limp, growing more and more uninteresting every moment.

Suddenly, in the midst of an apparently whole-souled effort on the part of Agwala to assist the government by attempting to worm the real truth out of Noni, one of the screen doors was impolitely thrown open by Elsie who exclaimed excitedly to Catherine:

"He's come back! He's coming here!"

At once, as if the air had been suddenly electrified, the whole atmosphere changed. Even the Great Dane almost forgot his provincial commissionership at the urge of an impulse to rush out on deck to verify Elsie's announcement.

No one asked who it was that had come back. Catherine rose, trying to suppress her eagerness, and Hogmanay, with a heavy nod to Parker, followed her.

Agwala looked a little puzzled. He did not know, with any certainty, what the excitement was about, but he was obviously not nearly so sure of himself in the succeeding minute or so.

He resumed his droning interrogation of Noni, however, with a commendable assumption of indifference, until Parker said shortly:

"All right. Wait. Maybe gray man make her talk li'l bit besser."

Agwala's eyes rolled. For a space he looked very sick and Noni seemed to huddle into her overcloth and edged, inch by inch, instinctively nearer to Margaret.

"Gray man come," Parker insisted casually and rose. "We go talk to him."

"*Cha!*"

"It's all right," soothingly. "This time he no flog you. Gov'ment live. Gov'ment no' like flog palaver. Come."

The mountain of Agwala's flesh shivered, whether with rage or fear it would have been difficult to have determined. But when he glanced sharply in Noni's direction, neither Margaret nor Malkett had any

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further doubt about his true attitude toward the girl.

And Noni, with a quick, indrawn breath, backed quickly and subconsciously away from the glint in his eyes, and literally placed herself, without being aware of it, under the beneficent guardianship of the law's right hand.

Malkett allowed his hand to rest lightly upon her shoulder and looked directly at Agwala when he did it. There was no mistaking that look and Agwala did not misinterpret it. He passed out on deck in Parker's wake with all the sensations of one who feels the earth beginning to rock under his feet.

Tommy Dillingham had been the first to see Charteris ambling casually past the hulk in his one-woman canoe, as if he were on his way to Grandison's beach.

But when the canoe's nose had turned in the direction of the yacht, it became evident that there was something bulky lying in the bottom of it.

All along the *Bonny's* rail eager faces, both white and black, saw him run alongside the companion ladder, and it is doubtful if any two of the spectators regarded his return in the same light.

Elsie was frankly exuberant and Tommy Dillingworth correspondingly unenthusiastic. Catherine's mouth was trying to be a firm and seemingly uncompromising line and Margaret was conscious of a decided sense of friendliness and gratitude. Hogmanay wore a dour look that was not inclined to forgive, very easily, the indignity Charteris had put upon him. Fran stood in the shadow of the library and did not go near the rail at all.

No one gave any thought to any one else. They were all too intent upon Charteris and, even more particularly, upon the bulky object that lay under his feet.

Having securely tied up the canoe, he calmly removed the bundle from it. At once, every one was certain that the object was the shrouded figure of a man. There was an inertness about that figure, too, that caused a shudder of apprehension to run along the rail.

"Need any help," Parker shouted and started down the ladder.

"No, thanks. I'll manage."

And with no great effort, Charteris slung his "cargo" over his shoulder and proceeded to carry it up to the *Bonny's* deck.

Nothing, in view of the wide-eyed whispering excitement he was creating, could have been more nonchalant than that entrance of his. It gave no suggestion of how carefully it had been studied for strictly practical purposes.

But if he saw the gleaming whites of Agwala's eyes, guessed how the fat chief's fears mounted at his every step, or noted the dubious questioning expression on almost every face, the total visible effect of it all upon himself was nil.

When he reached the deck and deposited his burden in the center of the semi-circle that naturally formed about him, he tucked his weather-worn sun helmet under his arm as usual, and, for a moment or two, despite the nearness of Parker and the somewhat cramped dimensions of the "stage," he was distinctly a man apart.

A glinting shaft of sunlight sneaking in under the awning as the sun drooped over the outer rim of the contracting circle of the bush, touched the silver gray shock of his hair and transformed it, with a suggestion of unreality, into a rippling mass of blue-white flame.

The youth that was in his face was quiet and untroubled and utterly devoid of any suggestion of haste or excitement or passion. He held his tall, square, yet leanly built body at ease and in perfect control. There was no stiff military straightness to the shoulders, nor any apparent tension in the limbs. Yet, there was always the hint that he was poised on the ball of the foot, ready on the tenth of a second's notice, to leap into action of the swiftest and most violent sort.

He glanced about briefly; bowed like a courtier to Catherine, to Margaret and to Elsie, acknowledged Tommy Dillingworth's courageously pleasant nod, and smiled whimsically at the expression on MacGregor's face.

Then, on the other side of the semi-circle —standing between Captain Walton and Andy Graham and somewhat screened by Malkett's generous bulk—he found Fran, whose eyes were bent to the deck.

As he was about to give his whole attention to Parker, Fran looked up quickly and Charteris paid more attention to the odd, almost imperceptible backward jerk she gave her head, than he did to her rather stilted smile. His brows were contracted in the faintest of frowns as his eyes met Parker's again.



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He saw the Great Dane's glance interrogating his, Charteris', waistline. And almost every one else was doing likewise. Most of them appeared suddenly to have discovered that he was wearing a sort of *cummerbund*.

Then, they knew it was not that; simply a combination of broad and somewhat ragged strips of cloth of different patterns tied about his waist. Both Hogmanay and Margaret knew they were pieces of print-cloth and Madras, generous strips from several overcloths, in fact.

"Is this—for me?" Parker asked, indicating the unmoving shroud at his feet.

"Yes. I thought you might like to have it. It isn't dead."

A deep and distinctly audible breath of relief greeted the rather callous statement, and before it had died away, Charteris added simply, "Perhaps Agwala can tell you who it is."

"All right." And Parker glanced at Malkett. "Bring Agwala over here, will you?"

This was necessary because neither Agwala nor Noni were in the forefront of the little semi-circle; nor did they want to be. Agwala, however, obeyed Malkett's nod without question, although he was muttering rapidly to himself in Jakri.

Then Parker stooped and began to unwind the eight yard piece of cloth in which Charteris' strange captive was bound; and so that the suspense would not be too long, he began at the head.

When the face appeared, Parker drew back with a sharp exclamation of surprize. Agwala, morally supported by Malkett, looked down upon it in a gaping, choking terror, while Hogmanay, taking a quick step forward, stopped short and thereafter gave all of his attention, not to Charteris, but to the chief of Agwala-town.

To the others, with the exception of Noni and Bark, the face meant nothing; just that of a native who had been drugged or otherwise rendered temporarily harmless, and a whispering chorus of "Who is it?" ran from lip to lip.

Noni, on her knees in the background, peering this way and that between several pairs of legs, recognized the man instantly, and slowly straightened, muttering a kind of prayer all to herself. She caught Bark's eye and he looked quickly away. Evidently Arthur was doing some rapid and most illuminating thinking, and was not finding the sum of it very pleasant.

"Where did you get him?" Parker asked Charteris rather sharply.

"He came to me—along with some others," Charteris said significantly, and slowly began unwinding the strips of cloth he had tied about his waist. "They came in relays, as it were. First two—then two more—then this," and he touched the figure on the deck with the toe of his boot. "I understand he always prefers to work alone."

Parker said nothing. With a growing fascination he watched Charteris undo the odd strips of cloth—one, two, three, four.

Agwala, also, was most intent upon the proceeding, and Hogmanay, who was watching the chief minutely, saw that the pieces of cloth struck a chord of memory that appalled.

"I couldn't bring the other fellows," Charteris said quietly. "Ask the fat gentleman if he recognizes this chap."

Parker started slightly. The question seemed unnecessary. Then he asked the chief mildly.

"You savez him?"

Agwala licked his dry lips. But only Charteris knew that the gray of death was in his face.

"*E-heh!*" he exploded in a throaty wail of disappointment and anger. "He—he be Doridi! I no look him long time. It be him tell Abado what me and Morrison talk at Forcados. I angry too much at dat Doridi man. He talk lie! He make me fool! Then he run 'way. I go flog him proper one time!"

"He's a liar," Charteris said to Parker conversationally. "But, unfortunately, Doridi will agree with him when he wakes up. Just like Noni. One moment, I want to make him a present of these."

And, taking a sudden step toward Agwala, he held out to him the four ragged strips of cloth.

"*Cha!*"

The chief's great bulk scuffed fearfully backward.

"Take them," Charteris said politely, while his audience craned forward in various degrees of eagerness to discover what it all meant. "They're yours."

"You—you make me fool!"

"No, not at all. You sent the wearers to me in the dark. I'm bringing—what's

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left—back to you while the sun's still up."

A gasp of horror echoed this calm and simple statement. Margaret gripped Hogmanay's arm, Elsie looked about her in bewilderment, and Catherine sidled a little nearer to Tommy Dillingworth. Fran's small body shivered then stiffened sharply. No one saw the queer triumph that was in her smile.

Agwala did not understand Charteris' English, but he knew what he meant. No one had any doubt about this, the provincial commissioner least of all. He caught Malkett's eye and, rising from his knees, said shortly.

"All right, Charteris. I imagine that's enough. We can hold——"

"Not yet," quietly, and without turning his head. "Hold Doridi, but let the other go. He needs a little more time to cook."

As he spoke he rolled the strips of cloth into a careless ball and broke suddenly into Jakri.

"The fangs of Agwala, the father of dogs, are brittle and soft. When he gnashes them in his rage, they crumble into dust. But bite upon these with safety, fat one! They have no bones!"

And with a contemptuous flip of his hand, he flung the loose ball of cloth in Agwala's face.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### SMOKED GLASSES

AGWALA'S head snapped backward so sharply one could almost hear his spinal column click in its socket. The violence of his anger was such that, instead of giving vent to it in words, an animal whine burst from his throat.

Charteris laughed at him softly. The incredulous wonder that was all about them did not seem to interest him in the least. His whole attention was upon Agwala and particularly upon the mouthing impotence of his rage. To all appearances, Charteris actually seemed to like it.

Then the Great Dane, with an unhurried stride, stepped between them.

"Sof'ly," he said to Agwala just as the chief was on the verge of finding his tongue. "No palaver. Wait."

"*Cha!* Two time he flog me! Two time he make me fool before all men!"

Parker nodded in perfect agreement with Agwala's frothing point of view, but ignored the opportunity for discussing it. He touched Charteris' arm and, with a monotoned word to Malkett in passing, casually insinuated the disturber of Agwala's peace toward the library.

Hogmanay followed them as a matter of course, glowering heavily at the outraged chief as he passed. Thereafter, in less than a minute, the unconscious and all-important Doridi had been whisked out of sight by Malkett's policemen; the semi-circular formation of spectators had scattered into groups that spread themselves from the fo'csle and the galley to the promenade deck and the engine-room; and Agwala, standing alone beside the rail, with a Yoruba orderly between him and the companion ladder, was, according to Fran Goddard, "the most virulently disturbed chunk of humanity" she had ever seen.

There was a queer unreality about the whole occurrence that baffled anything resembling sober analysis. It's full meaning was inextricably involved in obscurity.

But no one doubted the rather ghastly significance of the four strips of cloth. Malkett had been compelled to pick them up from the deck. No one else would touch them.

Elsie babbled whisperingly to Tommy Dillingworth and admitted that she felt shivery. Margaret remembered her first impression of Charteris—that of a soul encased in ice—and was amazed to discover how true it had been. Instead of coming any nearer, he had drifted farther away.

Catherine felt herself shrinking, minute by minute, into the inconsequential rôle of a bystander, who, for a brief half-hour or so, had once been granted an audience with the king—or the devil—she was not sure which.

Fran laughed; called it theatrical buncombe and in the same breath surreptitiously regarded Agwala with a venomous antipathy that was as threatening as it was revolutionary.

None of them was curious enough, apparently, to invade the library where Charteris, the moment MacGregor entered it on the heels of Parker and himself, wheeled quietly about and greeted the dour Scot as if the evening at Agwala-town had never been.

"Ye're a cool customer," Hogmanay admitted. "But though ye got me asleep that time at Agwala's——"

"I'm sorry. If my apologies——"

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"—— your apologies!" MacGregor interrupted in a prideful indignation that was not altogether assumed. "Me wi' twa guns in my hands and a woman lookin' on, and ye— Dod! But I must be gettin' auld and slow and creaky at the joints to let ye stand there and blether to me about apologies!"

"Shut up, Mac," the Great Dane broke in impolitely. "You're impeding the wheels of progress."

"Wheels o' fiddlesticks," Hogmanay grunted, and measured Charteris with his eye. "Aye. Ye're fast. I can see that. But— Well, go on wi' your story."

Charteris smiled.

"What's the object of this little conference?" he asked, as if the necessity were not quite clear to him.

"We would like to hear the explanation," Parker returned, carefully muffling the voice of authority.

"I brought most of it with me. And now, if you don't mind, I'll smoke one of your cigarets and get under way again."

Parker's eyes became less mild. But just as Malkett came in, the Great Dane obligingly picked up the tin of cigarets from his desk and allowed Charteris to help himself.

"I think," Parker said with a slight drawl, "you'd be safer here. Where did you find Doridi?"

Charteris lighted the cigaret and paid no attention to Parker's broad hint that he might be indefinitely detained.

"About half a foot behind me on the Warri-Sapeli road one evening," he answered, referring to Doridi. "As I happened to be looking for him at the time, he saved me a lot of trouble."

No one doubted it for a moment. Charteris' explanations, when he chose to make any at all, were always so simply and startlingly truthful that they had the instant effect of paralyzing criticism and of making the discussion of details wholly unnecessary.

Malkett switched on the light. Darkness was falling with its customary suddenness, and it was not advisable to allow Charteris' movements to be at all indistinct, even for a moment.

"And the other four?" Parker persisted.

"What other four?"

"The wearers of those pieces of cloth you made a fuss about."

"Oh—those? I think they fell into the water."

"I see," dryly. "And how do you know they were sent after you by Agwala?"

"I don't. That's why you can't hold him on my account."

"Then you were only guessing?"

"No. Just proving. The fat chief never does the trick himself, and you can't get any one to give him away. Let's go out on deck. MacGregor's going to smoke his pipe."

He edged toward the door on the port side, but Malkett stood between, and Charteris noticed that the screen door opened inward in any case.

"Better stay where you are," Parker advised mildly. "We've had another killing on the hulk—but you seem to know all about it."

"Everybody does. And it's no use questioning Noni. She won't tell you anything."

"But she might talk to you," Parker intimated.

"It isn't necessary. But I'd like to take her with me, if I may."

"Why?" sharply.

"I think she would be safer for one thing."

Parker winced.

"Oh, I think we can look after her," he said, and Malkett heard the rasp of impatience that was creeping into his voice.

"You won't be able to do it with a bit of red tape and just a uniform or two."

The Great Dane stiffened a little, and Malkett's heavy eyebrows lowered belligerently. Hogmanay, with a slow grin that was not very well concealed, continued to fill his pipe and stepped modestly into the background.

From the deck, where it was quite dark, the voices of Catherine and Fran, with an occasional interruption from Margaret and Elsie, sifted into the library like a low hum. But there was no laughter in these voices. A grim expectancy was in the air.

"Where is Abado?" Parker demanded suddenly.

"Up-river." Charteris flicked the ash from his cigaret into the ash receiver. "I'm going to bring him down in a few days."

Hogmanay's grin widened. Neither Parker nor Malkett, however, were in the mood to detect any humor in the statement.

Deep down in the nethermost reaches of him, Parker knew that Charteris did not have a particle of respect for authority of any kind, and it was obvious that he had no intention of being coerced into answering

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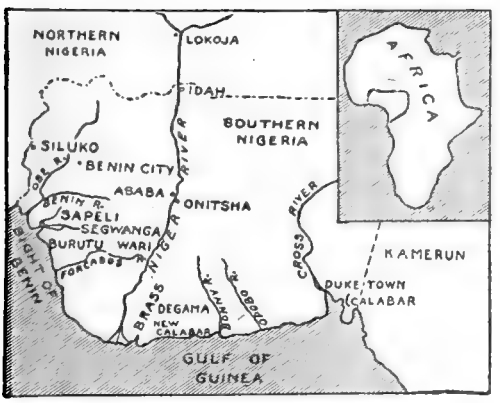
questions until it suited his purpose to do so.

His motives were strictly his own, and while there were several technical charges on which he could be held, subject to the Great Dane's discretion, the circumstance that he had delivered the long-lost Doridi




into the government's keeping, and that he had only too plainly indicated that Agwala was carrying on a skulking campaign of blood, did not suggest that his motives were inimical to good government, however antagonistic they might be to Agwala.

These considerations, regardless of how irritating Charteris' attitude might be, made Parker hesitate about taking a step from which he could not afterward recede with honor. There was just a chance that Charteris meant what he said about delivering Abado up in a few days, and it was unquestionably true that Agwala needed a "little more time to cook."

So, finally, with a mental reservation to insure the peace of Benin River against any untoward accidents, the Great Dane masked his irritation with a laugh that made Malkett stare a little, and asked as if it were of no importance.

"Are you going back to Grandison's this evening? Or farther up-river?"

"Grandison's, I think, for the present."

Parker nodded and turned to Malkett casually.

"We won't need Agwala tonight again, will we? Better calm his troubled spirit and let him go home to dinner. I believe he dines punctually at seven."

There was no twinkle in Parker's eyes as he spoke, and Malkett went out on deck knowing that the Great Dane's dignity, submerged as it was, had been reached and rasped.

If Charteris observed this, it did not disturb his equanimity. He accepted his freedom as a matter of course, even though he realized that there was a string attached to it; a string with Abado at one end.

Parker, who said he had some official correspondence to attend to, did not accompany Hogmanay and Charteris out on deck. For several minutes he wrote rapidly, and not long after Agwala had gone, a Yoruba orderly descended the companion ladder and stepped into the government launch, which immediately headed down-stream and finally disappeared into the mouth of the creek that led to Warri and Forcados.

THE moment Hogmanay and Charteris reached the deck, MacGregor whispered:

"Just a minute. Ye may be a better and a faster man than I am, but—are ye a friend o' mine or no'?"

He drew Charteris into the shadow toward the bridge as he spoke, and his grip was not to be trifled with.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means, in plain language, who killed Hugh Morrison?"

"I don't know yet," simply.

"Ye're lyin'."

"No, really."

"Then I'm sore mistaken in ye. I had a notion that maybe you and I could go halvers on the hangin' o' him."

Charteris laughed, a free and almost boyish laugh that, reaching the ears of Catherine, who was descending to her cabin to dress for dinner, made her pause a moment and wonder anew.

"If I find out who did it," Charteris told Hogmanay, after a deck-hand had shuffled past them, "I'll try to give you a first option on the job."

"Thank ye," dryly. "That's kind o' ye. I'll keep a note o' it." Then cannily: "Ye know, Charteris, I'm real sorry you're so soople—so quick. I ken fine I couldna match an eel like you. Not nowadays. But ten years ago—man! I'll warrant it would ha' been a bonny fight!"

Again Charteris laughed, more softly this time. For a moment his hand lingered on MacGregor's shoulder, and, without the aid of a single word, a claim to brotherhood passed between them.

Arthur Garriman Bark, going hurriedly toward the library with an anxious expression

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on his face, saw them standing there and marveled at the ways of men who were altogether white.

Charteris observed him, but did not appear to find him of any further interest. As far as he was concerned, the Dowadda episode had ended at Agwala-town. There was no sign of Noni.

"Dod!" Hogmanay sorrowed heavily, turning aft toward the companion ladder. "It's an awfu' thing when a man discovers he has his limitations!" Then, with an eagerness that was genuine: "Are ye in a hurry? Could ye go ashore and have a bit o' dinner wi' me?"

"I should like to, but I'm afraid I haven't time."

"Aye, just that," skeptically. "For a man o' leisure, ye have less idle time on your hands than any man I ever knew."

Charteris was smiling at this when he walked into the glare of the deck lights aft of the library.

Only Fran was sitting there now, the others, with the exception of Margaret, having gone below to dress for dinner. Margaret appeared under the light at the head of the companion ladder, just as Charteris turned his steps toward Fran, and Hogmanay catching sight of her there and noting a certain breathless hesitancy in her manner, went forward inquiringly.

Fran did not seem to be at all disturbed by Charteris' approach, but because of the deck lights she was afraid to look up for more than a second or two at a time.

"All you need," she said to him without any kind of formality, "is a little sawdust, a silk hat and a whip."

"That isn't half bad," Charteris admitted. "But in a place like this we have to make the best of what we've got. Your eyes, for instance. What have you been doing to them?"

Fran bent her head sharply, and her little body visibly shuddered. For a brief space there was a breathless pause which neither seemed anxious to break.

"Nothing," mumblingly. "They're all right."

"I'm afraid not. If you will let me take a closer look——"

"No!" Fran huddled away in sudden and frenzied alarm. "Not here! I couldn't — Oh, rot! Go away and leave me alone," she finished lamely, and flung an arm over her eyes as if to protect them from any interference on his part.

"I'm sorry." Charteris backed away reluctantly. "If you wore smoked glasses, that would help a bit I think. But," sympathetically, "that would be a pity, wouldn't it?"

Fran's head bent a little lower. She knew he was recalling the compliment he had once paid to her eyes. But words, adequate or even faintly sufficient to fill the awkward gap of silence, were utterly beyond her. A curious shrinking sense of shame and guilt crowded her deeper and deeper into the chair.

Then she heard Charteris say, "Good night, Miss Goddard," and heard him step quickly away from her toward the companion ladder. Vaguely, she knew that he was saying polite adieus to Margaret and Hogmanay; and, a few minutes later, that he had gone.

Not till then did she lower the arm that shielded her eyes, and when Margaret and Hogmanay reached her, she was erect and smiling.

Margaret also smiled, but Hogmanay knew that she was unusually nervous and still more oddly diffident.

In explanation of her trip down the companion-ladder, she said that she had been telling the gig crew to return to the hulk and come back for her later, as she had decided at the last minute, to accept Catherine's urgent invitation to remain for dinner.

This was true enough as far as it went.

But when Charteris reached his canoe at the foot of the companion ladder, loosed the painter and picked up the paddle, he stopped there.

Attached to the paddle, just where his hand gripped it, was a small, neatly folded piece of paper.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### BAIT

CHARTERIS did not hesitate very long. Yet he exhibited no sign of haste or curiosity. He allowed his canoe to drift away from the companion ladder, and when he was a respectable distance below the yacht, he produced a box of safety matches.

Whereupon he learned that the piece of paper was half a sheet of Hugh Morrison's stationery, and that the information it

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contained had been hastily scribbled in pencil. It read:

Noni could not find an opportunity to talk to you directly, and has reluctantly been compelled to confide in me. She has begged me to tell you that if you are going to Grandison's beach immediately, you will be in grave danger of your life. She would not tell me any more than this, but she seemed desperately sincere about it. I hope you will heed her warning.

MARGARET JARDINE.

Charteris slowly tore the note into small pieces and scattered them idly on the face of the river. He showed no anxiety, scarcely an appearance of interest.

For a little while he lolled about in the blackness of mid-stream, drifting carefully down the river, then, when he was some distance below the hulk, he swung about and paddled leisurely but directly toward the feebly winking lights of the old *Akerri*.

He did not go on board. His interest in the hulk seemed to have to do with her anchor chains, and with the hawsers that reached fore and aft into the bush. When he had circled the old gin-tank cautiously, he lingered under the anchor chain, humming a slow, monotoned dirge that was worthy of the best Kroo watch boy in the land.

Presently, out of the murky uncertainty overhead, a small monkey-like figure in a loin-cloth came down the anchor chain in a manner that at once suggested that the trick was not new to him.

His tribe was Sobo, and his duties on the hulk were those of a humble and inconsequent kernel boy. Noni had insinuated him into the hulk's personnel about ten days before. He hung down from the anchor chain toward Charteris with a contemptuous disregard for the law of gravity that would have been funny if it had not been so fiendish.

"You finish?"

"I finish li'l bit. Plenty watch boy live, sah. I no fit to make quick. All time sof'ly, sof'ly, slow, slow."

"All right. Tomorrow time all finish. Savez?"

"Yessah."

"Plenty oil and kernel live?"

"No, sah. Just li'l bit. Ca'go boat done take plenty oil and kernel 'way, sah."

"All right. When I talk tomorrow time, all finish. *Doh.*"

"*Doh.*"

Charteris ambled from under the anchor chain and moved lazily up toward Grandison's beach.

The *Bonny's* lights beckoned him to safety. Those on Marsden's beach re-echoed Hogmanay's invitation to dinner. Up-river, according to Noni—and she did not lie—there was nothing that invited save death.

He went right on; paddled slowly but steadily into the teeth of Noni's warning with an indifference that was as appalling as his confidence in the morrow was unshaken by any doubt of the issue.

The river, on Grandison's side of it, was almost entirely free from canoes. Those he did encounter on the way up, hugged the bush as closely as they could—a suspicious circumstance at that time; or, on the other hand, labored strenuously with the current in mid-stream.

Once, Charteris paused to reach behind him among his blanket wrapped belongings, and the result of his leisurely search was a sort of stunted rapier in a lean bronze scabbard, and a small, oddly shaped, lacquered tin box that contained a smug-appearing automatic pistol and a goodly supply of ammunition.

Evidently, when the occasion demanded it with sufficient emphasis, he had no objection to supplying himself with every possible means of defense. But it was equally apparent that he did not resort to the automatic very often, and certainly not in the hurry of sudden emergency. It was not even loaded.

The rapier-like weapon was obviously more familiar and it slipped into his belt and lay close to hip and thigh, as if it were a fixture and accustomed to any and every adjustment of its master's body. There was about it, too, that same lithe efficiency that, in repose, assumed a misguiding appearance of lackadaisical indifference to all thought of action.

Charteris loaded the automatic, dropped it into his hip pocket, and went on again with the same unhurried paddle-stroke as before. The age that was in his hair seemed to speak to the youth that was in his face in words of perfect understanding; words that abjured haste yet mocked at the degrading thought of retreat.

On the *Bonny*, the ship's company was sitting down to dinner. Doridi was waking up to discover that he was in a great darkness with irons about his limbs. Noni was

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keeping one eye on the blackness that held Grandison's beach while she worshiped and cursed Bark's uniform with the other.

Arthur was realizing with a heavy sense of impending disaster, that he had made several grave mistakes, and Daniel Dane Parker was looking at Catherine across a pure white tablecloth and hoping there would be no delay at Warri.

Charteris neared Grandison's; paddled directly for the tumbledown gig-wharf, the paddle blade trailing after each soundless stroke.

There was no evidence of life on the beach or about it; no canoes alongside the wabbly, mangrove breakwater sticks. But the place had all the appearance of an eery trap of doom.

Behind the ragged lime hedges that lined the path leading up to the house, a hundred of Agwala's frenzied whelps might lurk; the tangled, weed-grown clearing literally might be sown with them and the house itself could readily conceal a hundred more.

Numbers did not seem to interest Charteris. When he loosely tied up his canoe at the gig-wharf, the only word that fitted what he did then was suicide.

Supplying himself from his scanty belongings with two fair-sized stumps of candles, which he carelessly pocketed, he walked up the path leading to the house as if he were totally unaware of any circumstance that might interfere with his progress.

His left hand loitered over his hip pocket; his right hovered over the hilt of his stunted rapier as though he had stuck his thumb in his belt. His step was easy, natural, sure. He wore his helmet on the back of his head.

About half-way up the path, he paused for just the fraction of a second, poised on the ball of his right foot, the left, toe downward, halting in the middle of a step. Then he went on again. The pause was scarcely noticeable, but it said very clearly that behind his appearance of indifferent ease, was an alertness of brain and nerve and muscle that flung each and all of them into action in perfect unison.

He reached the end of the path. Beyond it lay a fairly broad, clear space, between the end of the kernel store and the stairs leading up to the house. This space he knew was safe unless Agwala had decided to risk everything on the doubtful result of a few rifle shots, or the still more doubtful discharge of a number of ancient muzzle-loaders.

Agwala did not like guns. He did not like the noise they made, and, just then, with the provincial commissioner so near, rifle fire was most undesirable, largely because rifles in the hands of the natives were contraband. Also, if the first shot missed——

Charteris reached the foot of the stairs and began to climb. At each step there was just the faintest suggestion of a pause; a firm grounding of the ball of the foot into the crumbling woodwork, yet nothing that spoke of even ordinary caution.

The first short flight of stairs terminated in a small landing; the next led straight up to the veranda. On either side of the top step the veranda rail formed a corrugated iron screen that offered ready cover to an unsuspected attack, but Charteris mounted step by step as normally as if the hour were high noon, and the place as free from danger as the doors of a church.

Two steps from the top his body arched just a little and again, for an infinitesimal space, he stood poised on the ball of one foot. But again he went on, and, halting on the top step, looked casually to right and left along the veranda.

There was nothing there. And when he calmly entered the room that had been Grandison's office, he stood in the middle of the floor for a second or two and listened.

Satisfied that there was no one in the house, he lighted both of the candle stumps he had brought with him and stuck one carefully on each of the window sills facing the river.

Having thus indicated that he was at home to any one who cared to call, Charteris strolled into the room that had been Grandison's bedroom.

Almost simultaneously, stealthy, snaky shadows began to glide out of the bush on right and left and rear. They came also from the kernel store in front and from behind the very lime hedges he had passed on his way from the gig-wharf.

Their number was uncertain; fifty or a hundred and fifty. It was impossible to say in the dark. Their uniform was a loin cloth, their weapons mostly machetes, with here and there an Upper Niger knife and a spear of a day that antedated the white man's introduction of the flint-lock for native usage.

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There was no mistaking their purpose. It was as plain as it was deadly, and apparently nothing was to be left to chance. Glistening black or bronze bodies slithered noiselessly on their bellies through the weeds, or slunk, a few cautious steps at a time, nearer and nearer to the house until it was completely surrounded and no loophole of escape was visible.

Then they began to creep warily and soundlessly up the stairs in front and up the galley or kitchen stairs in the rear. Others climbed up the water-tanks as a preliminary to reaching the veranda, while still others clambered like apes into the rooms at the end of the house formerly occupied by Grandison's assistants.

And each and all of them were governed by one consideration; a great and pressing fear of the awful wrath of Agwala, which was at once a tangible and a terrible thing.

That the "gray man who never hurried" was a *ju-ju* they did not doubt; but he walked like a man and could doubtless bleed like a man. Also, he was but one, and they were many, and Agwala, so that there would surely be no mistake, was superintending the business in person this time.

The fat chief's post of observation was the kernel store. His canoe was moored close in to the bush, above the beach. He wanted Charteris alive if he could get him that way. But, if circumstances did not permit, he did not insist upon it.

The cautious perfecting of the process of surrounding the house occupied about fifteen minutes, perhaps a little longer; and with every minute the number of Agwala's minions increased.

Out on the river, there were many more canoes than Charteris had seen on the way up from the hulk. Most of them, appearing in twos and threes, came from the direction of Agwala-town. Others that plied downriver in mid-stream or still farther over toward the opposite bank, came from a Koratown or Sapeli direction.

Charteris had entered Grandison's bedroom as if time were the least thing to be considered. From the rear window he looked down upon the beach and calmly watched the vague shapes that crawled with such sinister purpose toward the house from that direction.

Then, quietly, he picked up Ogulo's old and tattered mattress, which still lay in one corner of the room, and carried it into the saloon or dining-room.

This room was in the center of the house and afforded a passage straight through it from front to back. Charteris placed the mattress in the middle of the room and knelt on it for several minutes; calmly and without any haste or anxiety—just listening.

Suddenly, he produced his box of safety matches and applied a lighted match to a torn corner of the mattress; then another and another.

Speed, stealth and studied calculation were in every move he made. Silent as the lean, dully glinting steel that suddenly leaped into his right hand, he slipped to the rear of the dining-room and sped crouching in the direction of the rickety galley stairs.

The approach thereto was along a short and somewhat narrow corridor, then around a turn which led straight to the stairs. From this turn to the top step the distance was not more than three yards, the width of the passage about four to five feet.

The galley or kitchen was a low-built adjunct to the main building, the connecting link being the stairs, which were exposed to the elements.

Charteris reached the turn in the corridor and was on the verge of gliding sharply around it, when he dropped with truly alarming swiftness to his haunches, balancing his entire weight on one foot.

It was the performance of this odd trick that had enabled him to disappear so startlingly from under the muzzles of Hogmanay's revolvers, after which, in that instance, a sort of flying tackle had done the rest.

Now, he hesitated, glancing behind him into the dining-room.

The mattress was ablaze, hurling a broadside of sparks and spreading a beneficent screen of smoke, which when the floor, dry as tinder, began to go, would not be quite so beneficent if Charteris were compelled to remain there.

He knew exactly the effect this bonfire would have from every angle. Aside from other considerations he had definitely in mind, it cut off the probability of attack from what was now his right and left and rear, because he could not be reached except through the dining-room.

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Still more, it would create the all-important effect of surprize and subsequent consternation and panic, and it would immeasurably aid in publishing Agwala's assault upon Grandison's to Daniel Dane Parker, who could not fail to see the blaze and become curious about it.

Not that Charteris anticipated any assistance from Parker and "his uniform or two." Unless his, Charteris', calculations were all wrong, the Great Dane, Hogmanay and the rest would be amply employed on their own account.

Meantime, Charteris, having literally burned his bridges behind him, was interested only in removing himself from the house before it toppled about his ears. And time was not measured by minutes then, but by every tick of the clock.

There was some one around the turn crawling toward him; and unquestionably the stalking black was not alone. Charteris could hear the faint, stertorous breathing come nearer and nearer, and then he knew that the man had heard the crackling of the flaming mattress and possibly smelled the smoke. He could hear him sniff suspiciously, then pause, then sniff again.

Charteris waited four or five precious seconds more, then, realizing that there was a little too much hesitation and suspicion ruling the forces of Agwala, he snapped suddenly erect, wheeled as wide around the turn as space would permit, and crashed straight ahead.

With a startled cry, a huge and ferocious appearing black leaped to his feet. His machete arm rose desperately—and fell with a drooping, inconsequent motion to his side. The cry he had uttered ended abruptly in an ugly cough that slid thickly down into the dust.

Charteris swerved, twisting his body with eel-like swiftness, and lunged again. The second Jakri's machete missed him by a foot, and, in an instant, brushing aside the sagging weight of the near-naked body, Charteris went on.

The stunted rapier—and he used it as such and not as a knife—showed faintly in the dark like a dull glimmer of light, and the eyes of "the gray man who never hurried," echoed the curious, darting eagerness that was in the blade, and followed it straight through.

The distance to the stairs was short, the width too narrow for a mass attack. Charteris had not planned his escape without thinking of this. He took them, two at a time, and one was always, of necessity, a shade behind the other.

The third man leaped and struck with all the fury and force of his broad black body behind the blow. But the lean steel in Charteris's right hand slid carelessly upward, and the wrist that commanded it jerked ever so slightly. The descending machete gave forth a few, feeble sputtering sparks, then fumbled uselessly downward, as, a fraction of a second later, a stream of fire ran up the big black's arm on the inside. He screamed, then gurgled harshly; and Charteris planted his right foot unsparingly in the stomach of the fourth man and doubled him up like a jackknife before the third had reached the floor.

The fifth, half-turning to run, impeded the free movement of the sixth, and Charteris gave neither of them time to decide which way they wanted to go.

He drove straight on, a smashing, crushing, terrible force that took chances but gave none; that fought with everything he had every second and with a speed that baffled the eye and made mere words a feeble echo of the truth.

But the seventh was a man; the last to dispute with Charteris the three-yard passageway that commanded the stairs. Also, he was swift and in addition to a machete he carried a closely woven palm-fiber shield.

With a string of Jakri gutturals that were intended for those of his compatriots who were springing from the stairs immediately in his rear, he backed away a step, swerved, then hurled forward with the evident intention of severing the gray man's head from his body.

But there was no head there. With that same lightning-fast "trap-door drop," Charteris sank to his haunches, and the Jakri, whirling wide as a result of his own impetus, lost his footing altogether when Charteris, leaning forward a little, struck him sharply with his open left hand behind the knee.

The black came down, and the "dull glimmer of light" in Charteris' right hand went out for an instant under cover of the Jakri's shield. Charteris straightened with a twisting wrench of his body and stood alone on the top step of the stairs.

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There was no eighth man; at least, not there. All of those who had been on the stairs were gone or they were going. The sparks that were filtering through from the dining-room, the increased smell of smoke, the confusion which the sudden flare of the burning mattress had caused among Agwala's people in every other part of the beach, and the fate of those who had contended the three-yard passageway with "the gray man who never hurried"—all these things had communicated themselves to the fat chief's forces in the galley below. In addition to which, the men who might have been the eighth and ninth, had seen the gasping swiftness with which the seventh man had died.

Charteris did not pause on the top step to contemplate his next move. He heaped consternation upon consternation by plunging straight down the galley stairs, scarcely wasting a moment of time to consider what he might find at the foot in the narrow, pitch blackness of the galley itself.

He knew that there was a babbling chaos there, but whether it represented ten of Agwala's men or fifty, he could not tell. He wanted possession of the galley and meant to have it. Six steps from the foot, his left hand dipped into his hip pocket for the first time.

The automatic spoke once, straight through the galley doorway, and Charteris followed the bullet with a single leap as though he, too, had been projected from the muzzle of a gun.

He fired again as he sprang and yet again when he landed on his feet, and flung himself against a welter of sweat shining bodies that twisted and writhed away from him in a mad frenzy to escape. He saw no man's face, only the shrinking broad of their backs. Men could not fight, even for Agwala, when their enemy was surely a *ju-ju*.

And Charteris did not kill cattle. He encouraged their haste, however, with the point of the pale, lean steel and sent them scurrying and screeching into the open air as if all the devils in Jakridom were at their heels.

He did not follow. Scarcely three minutes had elapsed since he had set the mattress afire, and the blackness of the galley would be a fortress for a while; as long, he thought, as he cared to use it. The door that led out to the beach was a narrow one, and there was not the least possibility now that any of Agwala's hirelings would brave the barrier of the burning dining-room to attack from that direction.

In all likehood—and the sounds from the beach confirmed the supposition—the effect of the "bonfire" had been to make the fat chief's followers pause and gape and jabber and finally think of their canoes.

Presently a sound, as of one hurriedly descending the galley stairs, assumed tangible shape when a scrawny Jakri, who showed the whites of his eyes most prominently even in the dark, flashed through the galley on the winged feet of a ghastly terror.

He was the man who had been kicked in the stomach, and he had just recovered to learn that he was all alone and that Grandison's was on fire. It is doubtful if he saw Charteris as he passed.

When he had gone, Charteris made cautious inquiry to be sure that he was quite alone, and except for the company of a native who had got in the way of a bullet and who would not disturb him or any one again, Charteris learned that the galley was entirely in his keeping. If the other two bullets had found billets, the billets had taken them with them.

Down toward the waterfront the voice of frenzied hate and fear and awe rose and fell in waves, and then, for a minute perhaps, the only sound was the crackling bite of the flames feeding greedily upon bone-dry timber.

Kneeling close to the door, Charteris waited patiently for several minutes as if he were listening for something specific—an unmistakable sign that he would be able to interpret the moment it was given.

And, surely enough, it came—a new and terrible note that at first was not unlike a sobbing groan, bursting involuntarily from several hundred throats.

It died into a muttering sort of silence that moved haltingly hither and thither, then, second by second, rose octave by octave, into a shriek of unrestrained ferocity.

Charteris stood erect. The stunted rapier was back in its scabbard and the automatic had been returned to his hip pocket. He searched for his gun-metal cigaret case, found it and lighted a cigaret. There was nothing of exaggerated bravado about this.

Having baited his own trap with the

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blood and bone and sinew of his own body, he knew now that an unassailable period of leisure was his—as long as the galley lasted.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### RED-FLECKED WAVES

AGWALA stood beside the battered old mangrove-stick breakwater waiting for his canoe.

There were the sagging lines of defeat in his puffy face and a great fear of death in his well-nigh palsied body. There was no warmth in his fat nor any light in his eye. The swiftly glowing glare of Charteris' "bonfire" showed that his cheeks were the color of wet ashes.

Yet Agwala, from a strategical standpoint, had made no mistakes. Because the "gray man who never hurried" had too often eluded surprize attacks in the open, the fat chief had been extremely careful; first, to cage his bird and then to make more than doubly sure that every possible avenue of escape had been barred beyond peradventure.

In the vanguard of those who had surrounded the house were at least a hundred men. Rather more than twice that number had formed a second and third line of offense; and they had done their work well, too, with scarcely the crackling of a twig or the rustle of a leaf to betray their presence.

As the net had grown tighter and tighter Agwala had rejoiced and regretted only that he had not done this thing in the beginning.

And then, suddenly, the fire.

This was the unexpected; the inexplicable; the simple exercise of psychology over mere bestial cunning. Agwala had planned with darkness and stealth and overwhelming numbers. Charteris had counterplanned with nerves of iron, an old mattress and a lighted match.

Agwala could not understand this. It defied prescience, reduced Charteris' fight for life to the single task of taking possession of a narrow, three-yard corridor, snatched revenge out of the fat chief's greedy hands and hurled him headlong, in a paralyzingly short space of time, into doubt and panic and subsequent flight.

Also, as Agwala now knew only too well as he waited for his canoe, it was driving him straight into the arms of Abado.

This was why the children of Agwala groaned; and this, too, was why in the muttering deeps of despair, their voices were lifted to express the ferocity of their desperation to escape.

From the Koratown curve, about half a mile above Grandison's beach, canoes of every size and description had been dropping down river in twos and threes under the screen of the overhanging bush on the opposite shore. Some of them had come down in mid-stream. These were of twenty paddles or over, and one, at least, was of forty.

At first they had had the appearance of casuals. Later, their number increased alarmingly. When the candles showed in Charteris's window, the speed and character of their movements had undergone a marked change.

In ragged, but fairly well-defined formation, they began to curve in toward Grandison's, their main object being to bar Agwala's retreat down-river to Agwala-town. And while the chief was so intent upon the careful process of entrapping Charteris, these strange and plainly hostile canoes completed the equally careful business of entrapping him.

Agwala's reserves, coming stragglingly but steadily up from Agwala-town, were the first to discover this. They learned it when their passage up-river was suddenly barred by a thickening line of heavy canoes that reached almost entirely across the river. As this line was being momently augmented by more and more canoes that swept feverishly down from the Koratown curve, it became almost immediately apparent that Grandison's beach was completely shut off.

Naturally there was amazement and expostulation and, for a moment or so, a little fighting. Then Agwala's stragglers turned about and bent their backs as they had never done before, to carry the unbelievable news to Agwala-town and to every Jakri ear that would bend to listen.

Abado's line edged a little nearer.

Not many minutes after the mattress glared, Agwala and his cohorts beside Grandison's breakwater had become aware of their new and vastly more pressing danger. Some of them at once took to the bush; a few, at Agwala's frenzied instigation, with orders to reach Agwala-town as swiftly as legs and borrowed paddle-blades could take them.

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Others plunged into the river and swam for their canoes, most of which, in the care of a paddle boy or two, were strung close in to the bush just above the beach.

Agwala's was among them. He was too fat to run or dodge about in the bush in an all night chase. The "accursed gray man" was somewhere in his rear armed with a white man's gun that held many bullets. And in a very little while, Grandison's, including the ramshackle out-buildings, would in all likehood be ablaze from stem to stern.

Therefore Agwala had no alternative. His canoe, and as many of the faithful as he could muster as a bodyguard were his only faint hopes of salvation. He did not look very far into the future. It was too chaotic.

Neither did he speculate how strong the enemy was. Simply saw the shadow shapes of the ominous canoes hovering warily on the rim of the dark, and, with threats that were empty, promises he did not expect to be able to keep, and the stronger influence of a kind of solidifying desperation, he managed to hold together rather more than half of his forces.

These gathered about him along the waterfront as frightened children huddle as near as possible into the real or fancied protection of a parent. It was at once a savage and a pitiful spectacle. The increasing glare from behind them added a lurid kind of isolation to the sometimes shrieking, sometimes deathly silent group of victims in the trap.

As their canoes came rushing down, filled up and drew off a little way to await the others, Abado's ever strengthening line halted its movement inshore, and deliberately gave Agwala an opportunity to embark.

This was necessary to insure the unhampered escape of the gray man; the man whose understanding of the thoughts and deeds of men was as that of one who could detect the presence of a *bicuba* (threepenny piece) in the heart of the bush.

Because of the torch which Grandison's house now made, Abado was in the agreeable position of being able to see much more clearly than he was seen.

His first line, entirely made up of twenty- to forty-paddle craft, did not move until he did, and though his apparent timidity encouraged many of Agwala's followers to assume that the Sobo was at heart a craven, it did not delude Agwala himself to any extent.

To the cold marrow of his well-concealed bones, he knew that unless assistance came to him much faster than he expected it to do, the voice of Agwala would not be heard when the sun came up.

As he stepped into his awning-covered, forty-paddle canoe, he crowded the small deck amidships with as many of the most dependable men about him as it would conveniently hold.

Then, drawing away from the breakwater, he headed cautiously up river, and was immediately followed and surrounded by a bodyguard of canoes that, in the rear particularly, made a thick and formidable cluster.

Obviously, his intention was to bolt; possibly to try to reach Koratown if he could; in any event, to delay actual fighting as long as possible.

Abado waited. A tongue of flame shot out of Grandison's old dining-room doorway, withdrew a moment or two, then once more splashed the beach and the river with a yellow-hued light.

Almost as if it were a signal, forty paddles in Abado's canoe lifted as one. An uncanny, sobbing cry rose into the fire-tinted heavens and sped with fearful significance all along the Sobo line.

At first it was a solid sound that rolled thickly across the river; and then, as it traveled northward up the opposite shore, became thinner and thinner until it drifted off into a whimper beyond the Koratown curve.

Agwala heard that whimper, and hope assumed a ghastly pallor that was not relieved by any spot of color. The extent of his Sobo rival's strength was far beyond his most pessimistic estimate, and the whimper said distinctly that there was no escape in the north.

The faint puttering of a launch in the near distance down river was lost in the stabbing rush of many paddles, and even the scream of the launch's siren was but the voice of authority speaking in a whisper. Agwala looked for no succor there.

Therefore, cursing the name of the gray man into the slime of unprintable damnation, his little soul crouched deeper and deeper into the shaking mass of his fat, as

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he whined for a few more seconds of life from the might of his paddle boys' arms.

ON THE *Bonny*, the hulk and Marsden's beach, every eye was fixed on Grandison's.

Noni had been the first to see the faint, fitful glow that had become less and less fitful every moment; and Margaret Jardine, who glanced frequently and somewhat furtively in an up-river direction all through dinner, was not far behind her maid.

Since she had decided to accept Catherine's dinner invitation, Hogmanay had done likewise, and when she suddenly drew his attention to Grandison's, the entire ship's company immediately became interested. From that instant dinner departed, hesitatingly at first, then more and more rapidly into the realm of neglected things.

Presently, doubt gave way to absolute certainty. Grandison's was aflame and there were shapes of men grouped about the waterfront.

Then there came a faint suggestion of gun fire; a little later a far-off moan, and after it a more distinct scream that made Elsie grip Tommy Dillingworth's arm with both hands. The yellow glare became brighter and brighter; they knew the river had silently and mysteriously filled with canoes that were drawn across it like a restless and ragged black band; and finally, they heard the Sobo cry of vengeance.

Elsie shivered and became dead white, even to her lips. Margaret Jardine, leaning on the rail and peering up-river, straightened with a soundless, indrawn breath, glanced quickly up at Hogmanay and smiled. And MacGregor said:

"Aye. It'll be kind o' warm up there, I'm thinkin'."

He did not know that Margaret was smiling because she had given Charteris warning in time!

Catherine moved along the rail nervously, as if she wanted to get nearer to the scene than the confines of the *Bonny* would allow. Fran followed her until they occupied a somewhat isolated spot.

"Looks like the Queen's Birthday," she said referring to the "bonfire," and did not admit how hard it was for her to see anything that mattered. "Who's doing the yelling? They surely can put a thick and bloody note into it when they try hard. Hope Parker has sense enough to turn and run."

The Great Dane and Malkett, with two Yoruba orderlies, were half-way up to Grandison's by that time in the government launch, and Catherine was trying to follow the launch with her eyes, since she had been refused the privilege of membership on the small, investigating committee it contained.

"Don't gabble!" she said to Fran just a little irritably. "You're worse than——"

"Sh! We mustn't lose our temper. The steady nerve and the unwinking eye—these are the signs of a man in a crisis. And his woman must be worthy."

"You idiot! I don't care a hang if——"

"On the contrary, you'll say yes like a perfect lady. So don't get rattled. He'll come back all right. A good engine can always beat a canoe. Wonder what Charteris is doing in the middle of that mess?"

"Charteris!"

Catherine said the name with a vague suggestion of distance in her tone. It was as if she had to jerk her mind back to a realization of Charteris' identity.

"Oh, I imagine if he's there at all, he is getting a lot of his peculiar kind of cold-blooded fun out of it. I'd give a lot to know what it is all about."

Fran smiled and there was a hint of triumph in its make-up.

"What changed your mind?" she asked casually. "You were positively stupid over him for a week or two."

Catherine's hand subconsciously went up to her mouth.

"Was I?" absently. "He's so queer—uncertain—sort of evanescent. Real enough one minute and then—well, suddenly you realize that you don't know anything about him and never will. And you know how I'd hate a mirage if I ever saw one. Good Heavens! Look at that!"

A burst of angry fire reached greedily through the roof of Grandison's old house as though the twisting fingers of flame were clawing their way up to the higher roof of the night.

The whole face of the river, above and below the place, was lighted with an all too revealing brilliance, and it was not difficult to observe that the ragged black band of canoes was in fiendish pursuit of something or other that was fleeing toward the Koratown curve.

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"It's coming back!" Catherine exclaimed, referring to the government launch, which had come rather sharply to a full stop, swung about almost without pause and was racing back to the yacht.

"Then, that much being settled," Fran declared. "I think I'll have my dessert after all."

Furthermore, she did. Perhaps the spoon shook just a little, and the somewhat feverish, haunting look in her eyes might have been anxiety, but she finished the dessert and did not rush to the head of the companion ladder the moment the Great Dane arrived.

Parker did not say very much until he had had a brief, but pointed consultation with Hogmanay and Captain Walton. Then while the *Bonny* was quietly but efficiently becoming an armed camp, and Hogmanay was assuring Margaret that her father was in no danger, the Great Dane said to Catherine—

"It's an all-black scrap, and we won't be in the least likely to get into it."

"How did it begin—up there?"

"I don't know."

"Then how do you know it's an all-black scrap?"

"Because I have been expecting something it looks like. There'll be a stern-wheeler full of the Waffs (West African Frontier Force) around here from Warri tomorrow."

"Oh!" blankly. "And they'll put us out I suppose?"

"You'll have seen all you'll want to see by that time," Parker promised dryly. "I'd put you out tonight but I think you're safer here than groping through those narrow creeks in the dark. These fellows up there are making a most unearthly row, aren't they?"

Parker spoke more carelessly than he felt, and damned himself most heartily for not having sent for the Waffs after the attack on the hulk. This was futile and unneccessary self-condemnation because no man could have foretold within twenty-four hours what was taking place at Grandison's.

Even Charteris had not been able to consider it a probability more than eighteen hours in advance.

From the yacht only the fringe of canoes in Abado's rear was visible; these and the hungry spread of the flames belching outward and upward.

But the pursuit of Agwala had ended. The fight for his life had begun.

Just beyond the outer rim of the yellow glare on the river, hate and fear and unspeakable ferocity spoke in strange and awful tongues. Powerful black arms and shoulders surged back and forth in red-flecked waves just as the incoming tide slowly creeps up and up to swallow an outlying rock.

On the crest of the highest wave Ogulo-of-the-long-arms repaid a scarcely healed scar on one shoulder, and exulted after his fashion, that in business of the kind, he was truly a man among men. He transferred the curse that was upon him to many hurtling souls ere the sun again looked over the rim of the mangroves upon the ashes of the thing that Grandison had built.

Loafing on the edge of the ugly upheaval, a one-woman canoe moved back and forth without haste and without making any effort to participate in the quarrel. Charteris' interest appeared to lie down-river rather than up. Certainly, he gave no thought to Agwala, who, in the seething midst of it all, was watching his body-guard little by little wearing thin.

Catherine did not see any of this. She only heard it; and hearing was enough. At least, Elsie thought so. She was not one of those who strained their eyes toward the fire and the fight. She had gone below.

In the lounging room aft of the saloon, she was huddling in a huge easy chair, hanging on to Tommy Dillingworth with all her might. Her teeth chattered, and she shook from head to foot in a fear that made Tommy bite his lips and shift helplessly from one foot to the other.

"It isn't anything," he tried to assure her and patted her shoulder in his odd, fatherly kind of way. "At least, it won't bother us. Parker said so."

Elsie did not argue the point in words. She could still hear that terrible, sobbing Sobo scream, and the sounds that were now drifting down-river were not any more pleasant. So she simply dug herself deeper into the chair and clung to Tommy more convulsively than ever.

"We can't run to cover like this," Tommy said desperately after a while. "What the deuce will everybody think?"

"I can't g—go up there! I can't! It's horrible! I can see them—ugh!"

"All right," soothingly. "We'll just—

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Oh, hang it, Elsie! What the dickens do you want to go on like this for? It isn't square to me. I can't leave you down here and I can't let them think I care a rap what they chuck out on the stage for me to look at. Come on! You've shivered enough!"

"I haven't! I'm not— Who gave you permission to t—talk to me like that? You—why—" Elsie sat upright suddenly, her lips flaming with angry color. "You're just a clerk! A sub—sublimated office-boy!"

Tommy's apologetic eyes were not the least apologetic now.

"We won't discuss that. Come on up on deck."

"I won't!"

"All right. Don't get scared enough to hurt yourself. I'll come down every once in a while and tell you how things are going."

He walked abruptly toward the companion stairs and proceeded very calmly to climb.

"Tommy!"

He turned his head and slowly came down a few steps.

"Well?"

"I—I'm sorry. I——"

"I don't care how sorry you are. Come on up on deck."

"Tommy!"

Reproach, unbelief, consternation were in the name—and not a little fear.

"I'm not going to put up with a quitter all my life," Tommy said implacably and significantly. "Come on up on deck."

Elsie was on her feet now, staring. Vague murmurings came from the deck; fierce echoing cries from up-river.

"You came out here to see the sights," Tommy informed her. "And you start shivering the minute something real happens."

"You're beastly!" Elsie exclaimed passionately and moved forward a few steps.

"I'm worse than that. I'm a sublimated office-boy. Come on up on deck, you confounded little snob!"

"Oh! I—you—I could *kill* you!"

Tommy laughed at her and saw her little mouth tighten and her small hands clench. Then she went furiously toward him, and the fear had almost entirely gone out of her eyes.

"Fine!" Tommy approved. "If it means anything. Coming?"

"I hate you!"

"That'll help."

"Oh!"

She raced past Tommy suddenly and reached the deck before he did. But on the top step she stopped. The flaring furnace that had been Grandison's was more lurid and fearsome than ever; the savagery that screeched beyond it was momently becoming more naked, and there were canoes coming up out of the dark down-river. Elsie was sure there were dozens of them.

"Where are these going," she asked Tommy and tried very hard to be coldly superior about it.

"Up to the fight, I suppose. Wouldn't you go to a football match if there were one handy?"

Elsie gulped, paused, then touched his arm hesitatingly.

"Perhaps if you just let me——"

"Oh, hang on all you want to, but don't go burrowing below deck again. We're all more or less wabbly at the knees, but we're not falling down-stairs the minute somebody yells."

"All—right. But you needn't be so rough."

Tommy grinned and mopped his face and forehead.

"Are you going to marry me?" he asked abruptly.

"Why—why—Tommy!"

"All right. Let's go and join the crowd."

"But," timidly, "I haven't said anything!"

So they sat slowly down upon the top step of the stairs and, while a red world whirled madly about them, whispered the softly cadenced, simple white lies which youth tells ardently to youth, and age remembers and again believes.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### BUTTONS

CAPTAIN BART JARDINE looked sad. He paced the bridge of the hulk, craning his scrawny neck up-river, muttering incessantly to himslf.

"It's them matchets! —— if it ain't! Matchets an' gin an' powder and blood! Them things always foller each other. 'Tain't right."

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Then, mumbling something that sounded like, "I ain't had a drink in a long while," he descended to his cabin where he assured himself that gin was all right for the man who could stand it.

After he had twice convinced himself of this, he proceeded to uncover a motley group of weapons he might be likely to want. Two revolvers, a double-barreled gun, an Indian club, an Upper Niger wrist-knife, a marlin spike, a machete and a prehistoric golf cleek that hinted at an unwritten chapter in his life, made a respectable array, and with the assistance of another drink, he decided in which order it would be best to use them.

It was at this juncture that Margaret arrived to assure him that they were in no immediate danger. She had made the trip on the *Bonny's* launch, escorted by Hogmanay, during a short lull in the upward rush of canoes from Agwala-town.

These canoes were frenziedly going to the rescue of Agwala, unaware of the circumstance that they were, even then, just a little too late, and that Abado's line was changing front to face down-river.

Hogmanay, having seen Margaret safely aboard the hulk, had gone back to his own beach. He had not approved of Margaret's little journey, but he could not refrain from silently applauding it. His own duty to the firm called him to Marsden's and he could not, in that case, argue very convincingly against Margaret's return to the hulk.

"What d'ye want?" Jardine demanded the moment he heard Margaret's foot on the deck. "Oh, it's you, is it? You spend all my time with them —— Morrisons till —— busts loose, then you come runnin' to me for protection! Seems to me that's all you think I'm good for. Well, I'm your father and I ain't goin' back on you, but I've got feelin's, just like any other man, —— if I ain't!"

"The provincial commissioner says the fighting isn't going to affect us very much," Margaret said quietly. "But we'd better muster the Kroo-boys. Perhaps——"

"Who's givin' orders on this ship? You or me? I ain't askin' your advice neither. I'm captain on my own ship an' if you ain't satisfied with the way I run her, you can go back where you came from. It's them Morrisons that's to blame for all this killin' and murder that's goin' on. They fill them niggers full o' gin and drive 'em crazy and then I got to sit up and lose my good sleep to see that they don't do you no harm! An' yet you go hobnobbin'——"

Margaret left him then and went in search of the Kroo headman. Together with every other Kroo-boy on the hulk, she found him perched on the port rail of the lower deck staring up-river with jabbering amaze.

In as few words as possible she explained to him the situation as she knew it and quietly gave him orders to post his boys along the rail so as to be in readiness for anything untoward that might chance to swerve in their direction.

Then, having seen her orders carried out, and making sure that each boy was armed with a machete, she went to her own cabin and carefully examined her revolver.

Her father was fumblingly journeying between the gin bottle and his array of weapons, changing his mind about the order of precedence of the latter at the end of every trip.

So Margaret went up on the bridge, unostentatiously taking her revolver with her, and there established herself to watch the unbelievable drama on the river drag its red and tortured length through the remaining hours of the night.

And the incessant wailing of Agwala's children, growing louder and louder completely drowned the low, rasping sound—as of a file scraping against iron—that came from the vicinity of the anchor chain.

THE racing speed of the river was on the side of Abado's battalions. Agwala's too tardy rescue force had to fight up-stream, and though, after the first hour, they appeared to arrive in shoals and introduced flint-locks and a contraband rifle or two into their screeching desire for vengeance, Abado's line moved, little by little, down-stream.

It also betrayed a capacity for doing some shooting on its own account, and, having reached a point just a little below Grandison's beach, it seemed content to remain there for a while at least.

Charteris was nowhere visible in the midst of that thick and ghastly chaos. He was in the rear again where Agwala's battered canoe, having been towed by its captors into the deeper dark, up-river, was lying in the shadow of the bush.

For a while Charteris knelt on its deck



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amidships, and under the light of a hurricane lamp in the hand of a shivering Sobo, he performed a work of boundless mercy.

Abado, wildly exultant in his triumph at first, looked on in sullen and irreconcilable amaze. He could not understand why the face of the gray man had become so cold; why he did not approve of the thing he, Abado, had done.

In all things, save this one, Abado had followed instructions to the letter. He was following them now. Instead of hurling Agwala's accursed breed straight down-river to the sea, he was obeying the gray man's orders by refraining from carrying the fight any farther south than Grandison's beach.

Therefore, since he had thus respected the necessity for protecting the white mammies on the white ship and steadfastly conducted his quarrel with Agwala's people at a comparatively safe distance from the *Bonny*, Abado considered—as nearly as he could consider such a thing—that he was being a perfect gentleman under extremely trying and tempting circumstances.

Presently, Charteris paused in his gruesome labors and said to Abado in Sobo—

"To accept the word of Abado, is to allow an infant to light a lamp."

Abado had nothing to say. He looked pathetically contrite and solemn and made a real effort to apprehend Charteris's point of view.

"The gray man who never hurries is angry," Charteris said much more calmly than he felt. "He took Abado's neck out of the white man's noose and gave Agwala the mighty into his hands. Even now, the children of Agwala are breaking their bodies on the rock of Abado's wrath, and the Benin River cries out that Abado the Sobo is strong. But the gray man knows that he is but a small child who struts like a man."

Abado did not like this. It spoiled the glory of his triumph. But, in the deeps of him, he was much too afraid of the strange *ju-ju* gray man to argue the matter. He had had too much evidence of the exact nature of Charteris' so-called *ju-ju* propensities to question his opinions or his authority even in anger.

Then Charteris dropped suddenly into pidgin English:

"Go fight. If canoe go down pass Grandison beach, big palaver live. Savez?"

And without a moment's hesitation Abado obeyed. Plainly the anger of the gray man startled and puzzled him beyond words.

Charteris resumed his ministry of mercy and when it was ended, he remained seated on the deck of Agwala's canoe. Except for an occasional visit to the ever-shifting barrier of the fight, he made Agwala's canoe his headquarters till the sun came up.

As the hours labored on, his expression became a little less cold, and finally the suggestion of a grim smile flickered in the corners of his mouth.

The smile was not echoed in his eyes, because there was no humor in it. But he thought it was just possible that, after all, there might be a certain crudely built road to justice in Abado's conception of a natural thing to do.

NONI sat in the dark on the *Bonny's* lower deck and moaned in a low, monotonously sing-song fashion for her dead. Her chin was sunk upon her knees, and her round young arms were wrapped about them. She rocked back and forth in a slow, tireless manner that hinted it might last for days.

When the guns began to go off, she raised her eyes a little, but no more than that. The rocking motion continued without a pause.

Up and down-river, along the narrow twisting bush paths, and into the darkest corners of the most insignificant creek, a terrible whisper of doom was speeding with incredible swiftness.

Agwala was dead, and Abado the Sobo had trod upon his belly!

So Noni mourned, as it was fitting that a good Jakri girl should, for the death of her mother's brother—the greatest chief among the Jakri people. And there was nothing assumed in her mourning.

That Agwala had done his best to murder her several nights before, did not enter into Noni's calculations at all. Such was the privilege of one so great as he. She had thanked her woman's gods that he had not succeeded, but it had been nothing more than she had expected; and little more, according to a well-established code of ethics covering the case, than she deserved.

Consequently, she moaned and rocked and watched Arthur Garriman Bark out of the smallest corner of one eye.

Arthur wore a wild look and wore it most uneasily. He walked to and fro along the

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rail, talking in a muffled, staccato fashion, clapping his hands together above his head, every now and then, simply to indicate that there was nothing in Jakri or English or any other tongue that would express his views upon the several staggering truths he had been compelled to assimilate in the past few hours.

Among other things, he was reminded of what Charteris had whispered to him in the *Bonny's* library on a certain memorable occasion. It had been in plain English and there had been nothing mysterious about it.

"Abado didn't do it. Where is Doridi?"

Arthur had completely ignored the suggestion. In addition, he had done many things which he now knew to have been done because Agwala had insidiously put the ideas into his head. And Agwala, he had every reason to believe, was dead. Empty canoes, and others that were not quite so empty, were reeling and swirling past the yacht telling their own silent stories of Abado's revenge.

Arthur remembered distinctly he had once tried to shoot Abado. This was a most unpleasant thought; a thought that had a still more unpleasant future before it.

Further, the provincial commissioner had not been in the least agreeable that afternoon when Charteris had left the yacht. In fact, Arthur's uniform was in danger. He could, of course, wear white flannels, but that would not make Abado's arm any shorter.

Occasionally, Arthur glanced toward Noni. She was mourning for Agwala, but she was also the daughter of Abado—and Charteris was Abado's friend and hers.

Perhaps——

He approached Noni slowly; stood about a foot away from her and said in Jakri:

"The back of Agwala is broken. And the song of Abado's strength is the death wail of the mothers of Agwala's sons. Noni-of-the-little-feet is Abado's daughter. Her marriage price will be the price of many wives. But I am not poor."

Noni lifted her head, and the rocking motion stopped. She did not look at Arthur's face very long, but she regarded his uniform most carefully before she spoke.

"Your fear of Abado puts the words upon your tongue. Your knees are bent and your hand is like a leaf in the wind. But if the gray man nods his head——"

Noni shrugged her smooth, shiny shoulders with the resignation of one who is perfectly well accustomed to the idea of being subservient to the wishes of others in matters of the sort.

"Is it to the gray man the marriage price must be paid?" Arthur asked with an incredulous stare.

Noni rose leisurely, mumbling something that was not distinct, and strolled idly to the rail with a sinuous, swaying motion. She came back again suddenly and not quite so idly. A canoe, with an upturned face in it, swept past, and the girl had no desire to see any more like that. She clutched Bark's wrist and, for a moment or two, forgot to act. Then, she knew that she was holding on to one of the sleeve buttons on his tunic.

Her fingers closed upon it convulsively, with a sudden intensity that startled Arthur into a lover-like frame of mind in spite of his perturbation. Noni pushed his free arm away, glanced into his face, found that it was good to look upon, then dropped her eyes down the front of his uniform.

The buttons glittered dully. His polished leather leggings and his white man's boots——

Truly it was good to be the slave of the gray man's eyes and ears and tongue. Softly, softly, he spoke and moved, and the things that he whispered today were the things men gaped at tomorrow.

Therefore, if he would but whisper, the dreams of Noni-of-the-little-feet would surely come true.

Her sons would be at least five in number. Their bodies would be lean and straight and their hands would be sure and would not tremble. Their heads would be lifted above the heads of other women's sons. They would stand before her in their white man's boots, and the buttons of silver that were brighter than the white man's money would laugh with her in the light of the morning sun.

So she leaned her cheek, with a little shudder of anticipation, against Bark's shoulder. And the faintly glimmering buttons smiled back to her in the dark.

ABOUT 4 A.M. the furrow between Daniel Dane Parker's eyes became a little less pronounced; half an hour later it had disappeared. When the sun sprang from behind the mangroves to glare upon the horror of the night, the Great Dane almost liked Abado.

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Wrecks of men and canoes drifted past the yacht in ghastly disorder. Up-river a little way, the picture was just a jumbled swarm; the slow and sullen retreat of what was left of Agwala's avengers who did not have strength enough left even to hurl a curse at the conqueror.

Beyond that, about half a mile below the smoldering ashes on Grandison's beach, was a solid mass of canoes that thinned off dimly toward the Koratown curve.

Even Parker gasped when he saw them. Also, he marveled still more at Abado's ability to restrain his impulses with a force like that at his back.

All through the night there had been nothing to do but wait for the gory struggle up-river to sweep southward, and with four ladies on his hands, the Great Dane had been troubled with nasty colored visions that had become more nasty when the shooting began.

But the location of the fight had scarcely shifted. It had given vent to sporadic outbursts of extreme violence that had carried it a quarter to half a mile nearer to the yacht, but, in the lulls between, had always resumed approximately its former line.

The Great Dane appreciated the admirable restraint which this divulged and he had a shrewd suspicion that Abado was not responsible for its conception.

Catherine would not have sympathized with his point of view had she known anything about it. For a while the blaze at Grandison's supplied a picture which suggested once or twice that she had better go below. But she stayed doggedly on deck, watching some splashings from the grisly painter's brush go floating by. Later, however, when the torch which Grandison's old place had held out over the river, had sputtered and died, she felt that she was being cheated out of something.

With the coming of the sun, she gasped and put a hand quickly up to her mouth. Fran smiled a little wearily, and the Great Dane who was standing beside them said quietly:

"Better get under cover, I think. These fellows may begin shooting just for the fun of the thing and——"

"No. I'm all right. I can stand it."

"That isn't the point," Parker declared smoothly and touched her arm. "I don't want a stray potleg spoiling your complexion at this stage in the proceedings. Take her below, Miss Goddard, will you?"

"Do it yourself," Fran advised and walked toward the companion stairs without any fuss. "You're big enough."

The Great Dane grinned—the way Catherine liked him to—and she suddenly learned that his large, broad hand was not to be trifled with.

"Oh, don't be ridiculous! I'm not a squeamish fool!"

"No, of course not," pleasantly. "But orders are— God!"

Catherine turned her head in the direction of Parker's sacrilegious amazement, and her eyes also gaped wide.

Everybody's did in the succeeding half-minute. Even the sons of Agwala forgot their dead to stare open mouthed at the phenomenon that was taking place down river.

Hogmanay, who had been greeting the dawn with the hundredth psalm on the penny whistle, did not believe it. He called Garland furiously and asked him if he saw the same thing. Garland said he did, and the Kroo-boy chief steward agreed with him.

Hogmanay reached the beach in something less than four steps, bawling inexplicable Scotch all about him.

As a matter of fact, even Charteris was not a little surprized when he heard of it. He had not anticipated anything so capricious as that.

And the only thing in the river that was perfectly calm about the matter was the hulk *Akerri*, herself. She was neither startled nor flustered by the so sudden flaring of the limelight upon her.

When her hawsers abruptly slacked off and her anchor chains snapped like that of a rifle shot, she may have thought there was something unusual in the air—but she knew it was time to move.

For a month or more she had realized that her bed of mud had shifted and that, at high water, she could float if she were given a chance. Of course, her old plates rattled a bit and she did feel ashamed of her paint with the immaculate *Bonny* lying by. But she hadn't been out to sea in a long while.

Rivers and mud were all right for a scow, but a ship that was a ship up-anchored finally and went somewhere to get the feel of the gray-green salt water awash her decks again.

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So with no anchors or hawsers to hold her back, she yawed cannily out from the bush as though—like a rusty and frowsy old lady who really should have had more sense—she was not altogether sure she would not be better off in the mud after all.

Then the swirl of the river caught her and pointed her prow down-stream. The voices that were in her rattling old plates screeched—in fear or agony or delight, no man could say.

With the eyes of the Benin country upon her—in the midst of the petty triumphs and defeats of men—she wallowed groaningly down to scatter her uneasy old bones on the grumbling sandbar in the river's mouth.

MARGARET was still on the hulk's bridge when the miracle was performed. Her father was asleep; and it was the kind of slumber from which a man does not awake on a moment's notice.

An all-night discussion with himself on the subject of the relative merits of the various weapons at his command had ended when the second bottle tipped over. After that, he went to sleep and he was still in this blissfully ignorant condition when Ted Ellison, the *Bonny's* chief officer, with the assistance of Hogmanay and the Kroo headman carried him down the wabbly companion ladder while the *Akerri* calmly continued her seaward journey.

Naturally, Margaret had been somewhat startled at first. Then she smiled and finally laughed. She was still laughing when the *Bonny's* launch, Hogmanay's gig, one of the yacht's lifeboats—attended by a jabbering collection of rather fearsome-looking canoes, overtook the hulk and removed its passengers.

Some of the Kroo-boys had become excited and jumped; so it was not thought remarkable that a certain small Sobo kernel boy was among the missing.

Captain Bart Jardine and his Kroo-boys were taken to Marsden's beach and placed in the care of Garland. Margaret went to the *Bonny*.

The hulk, with the lifeboat and a feverish group of rapacious canoes at her swaying heels, disappeared into the low thundering mist.

Margaret was smiling when she reached the yacht's deck. There was actually a pronounced spot of color in her cheeks. Something that resembled a great weight had dropped from her shoulders, and there was a lift to her feet she had never known before.

To her, it was more than a miracle. It was a gift of freedom; a thing of boundless promise, and she looked at Hogmanay—suspiciously.

Finally, because she simply had to know, she drew him aside and asked him without mincing matters in the least:

"Did you cut our anchor chains? With a file or a hack saw or something?"

"Me!"

Hogmanay's amaze was too genuine to be assumed, and as he looked at Margaret his growing self-reproach was even more so.

"Dod! Why did I no' think o' that long ago!"

## CHAPTER XXX

### STRAIGHT—LIKE A MAN

LIKE children, suddenly diverted by a new toy, the somber and slow retreat of Agwala's shattered and mourning people degenerated into a yelling and gesticulating excitement.

In a startlingly short space of time, the river above the yacht was swept clear of everything save the black mass of canoes in the vicinity of Grandison's.

There was no shooting; no attempt to interfere with the rescue of Margaret, her father or the Kroo-boys on the hulk. Some of the canoes actually tried to assist, and one of them did pick a near-drowning Kroo-boy out of the water. Most of the others—a ragged horde of screeching irresponsibles—pursued the fast disappearing hulk as though they were glad of the opportunity to forget their troubles.

"Aren't they queer?" Catherine asked as she sat down to breakfast. "They fight like fiends all night and, in a moment, they change their minds about everything and go madly chasing a possible bit of salvage. Later, they'll take up their wailing where they left off, I suppose?"

"Aye. That's the way o' them," Hogmanay said. "Just like bairns. Is that swarm up there beginning to move?"

This looked to be the case for a little while, but it was past two o'clock in the afternoon before Abado's host finally did begin its slow, almost stately movement down-river.

In the interval, Parker made no effort to interfere. The stern-wheeler had not

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arrived from Warri, and with each hour, he received the increasing impression that, like Catherine and the rest, he was merely a spectator.

When a startled cargo boat, coming down from Sapeli in mid-forenoon, crowded its way through the mass and, instead of being molested in any way, was raucously cheered, the Great Dane knew that there was nothing he need officially worry about.

"They're not all Sobo," he said to Hogmanay when the canoes were still a mile away.

"I was thinkin' that. That man has a lot o' friends scattered about this country evidently."

Catherine, who leaned on the rail between them, looked up quickly.

"Charteris? You really believe he is responsible for the fight last night?"

A little farther along the rail, Fran smiled for no reason that Elsie could see.

"And in a wee while," Hogmanay said dryly, "he'll be comin' aboard to ask ye if ye slept well."

Obviously, Catherine did not welcome the prospect. She edged along the rail perceptibly nearer to the Great Dane's good right arm. Fran, who had quietly observed the movement and also the unusual timidity that suddenly expressed itself in Catherine's face, glanced at Margaret and then at Elsie, and saw a varying degree of the same sort of dependence in theirs.

Then she studied her boot toes for a while until the sharp pains in her eyes diminished a little. These stabbing reminders did not, however, prevent her from wondering if one had to go blind really to see.

When she dared to look up again the great pack of canoes was barely half a mile away. It seemed as if there were thousands of them; from grotesquely painted forty-paddle war craft to bobbing four-paddle kernel canoes that trailed raggedly in the rear.

There were chiefs of the Bini, Igabo and Ibo tribes among them; a smattering of Ijo and the pretentious, ornate war canoe of a prominent chief of Brass. The remainder were of the Sobo breed, and Abado had proved himself, without any doubt, to be the absolute master of his own people.

Even the austere old potentate from the Brass country admitted this; and his pitying contempt for anything so thoroughly "bush" as a Sobo, was nothing short of sublime.

There was no sign of Charteris in the forefront of the pack. But when Fran looked a third time, the jogging mass parted slowly, fanwise, and down the widening lane thus formed, there came a trifling one-woman shell leading two forty-paddle canoes as by an invisible string.

For a little while there was a low, jabbering hum; and then a silence that was deep and vast.

Charteris was in no hurry. As usual, his paddle strokes gave no indication of the extraordinary. Stroke by stroke, quietly and without a single upward glance at the *Bonny's* gaping rails, he paddled toward the yacht's companion ladder, while an escort of heavy canoes strung themselves silently down-river to right and left until there was no possibility of interruption from any direction.

The canoe immediately behind Charteris was Abado's. It followed him as carefully and docilely as if it had been learning the trick for weeks.

Behind Abado, came the battered wreck of another forty-paddle canoe. Splintered poles indicated where the awning had been, and if one looked closely enough—but there was no need for that.

It, too, followed the insignificant one-woman canoe in front slowly and obediently, being manned by Sobo paddle boys, who did not, however, greatly exult in the honor that had been assigned to them.

Because, as any one on the *Bonny* could see, when Charteris had calmly led the canoes alongside the companion ladder, the rumor that Agwala was dead proved to be altogether erroneous. At least——

Hogmanay plucked jerkily at his beard and just dimly comprehended that Margaret was hanging on to his other hand. He did not observe that Catherine was finding Parker equally useful, or that Fran Goddard had put her arm up quickly before her eyes.

He saw Charteris coming simply and naturally up the companion ladder, with Abado trailing, dog-like, at his heels.

And below them, in the third canoe, he saw Agwala.

The great oily bulk of him was lying on its deck, staring upward. There was a wild and awful look in his eyes, and something white, like a gag that was tinged with red, covered his mouth.

Suddenly he raised himself with a

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desperate, convulsive effort on his elbow. Pawing the air with one hand as if he were trying to seize upon something that constantly eluded him, Agwala tried with all the might of his fat to speak.

Then, in a frenzy of appalling impotence, he began tearing the "gag" from his mouth. The result was as futile as it was hideous.

No more would Agwala speak contemptuously of the "sons of the mothers of pigs". Nor of anything in this world or the next. For Agwala was forever damned in the sight of his fathers and his own people.

The gods that were his would never understand the mouthings of the man who was without a tongue.

IN THIS instance, Tommy Dillingworth did not object to Elsie going below. Catherine followed her, leaving the marks of her fingers plainly imprinted on the back of the Great Dane's hand. A thick whisper from Hogmanay encouraged Margaret to follow Catherine.

Fran remained on deck. She stood with her back to the rail, looking steadily down at her feet. When Charteris reached the top of the companion ladder and passed under the awning, he was not slow to observe that she was the only woman in sight.

Abado, no longer the captain of a conquering host, but simply a Sobo, and a very nervous Sobo at that, hung on Charteris' heels like a puppy that knows it is going to be whipped.

A low monotone came up from the river, but no more than that. Whatever babbling excitement there was, just then, confined itself to the *Bonny's* decks.

Parker's expression was strained as he moved to meet Charteris and the Sobo. Malkett's was heavy with a sullen disgust and doubt. Hogmanay did not know what to think, and looked it.

Only Fran smiled. She looked up as Charteris reached her and he stopped short. His sun helmet was under his arm as usual, and he answered her smile with another that was equally genuine and free from restraint of any sort. Then, when he glanced quickly at her eyes, she looked down at the deck again hurriedly, and he passed on.

She saw him and the others disappearing into the library, then walked slowly over to a deck chair, because she was afraid her legs would not hold up any longer.

Vaguely she understood that the two Yoruba orderlies who stood at the top of the companion ladder, had left their posts to go down to the foot of it to stand guard over Agwala, and that two native police were functioning at the top.

Then she closed her eyes tightly and squeezed out the fires.

IN THE library, Parker assumed his customary place, trying to look a little less official. He did not like the rôle.

Charteris sat on a corner of the desk, and Abado squatted on the floor at his feet. Malkett stood with his back to the wall between the two doors, and Hogmanay occupied a chair on Parker's right.

"Well, let's have it," Parker said abruptly.

"Aye. It's high time."

"I suppose so," quietly. "You see, it's largely been a question of ethics with me."

"Ethics! Dod! Paddlin' your own canoe in a country like this isn't the only queer notion you've got!"

"The thing began very possibly when Abado sold his first bushel of kernels on a white man's beach, and Morrison first became a palm oil ruffian at Calabar."

"I'm no' anxious to listen to ancient history," Hogmanay said impatiently. "A' this jookerie-packerie that's been goin' on has just one answer that I'm interested in. Who murdered Hugh Morrison?"

"Doridi," simply. "Didn't you know that?"

"Eh?" blankly. "And ye can prove that Agwala put him up to it?"

"I think, under the circumstances, Doridi will be only too glad to prove it himself." Then to Parker, "Let's see if I'm right."

The Great Dane did not hesitate about complying. Most of the strain had gone out of his face as quickly as it had come in, and the appearance of Doridi and Noni a few minutes later removed it entirely. The faces of the two native policemen who brought them in enhanced the impression that Charteris was right beyond a doubt.

Noni was quiet enough, in a speechless sort of way, but Doridi was in a palsy of fear. He immediately groveled on the floor as near to Charteris' feet as the native police and Abado would allow.

Nothing could have been more powerfully, and at the same time pitifully, indicative of Charteris' uncanny influence over

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the native mind than that. Doridi ignored Parker and Malkett and Hogmanay as if they were not in the room, and even Hogmanay almost felt sorry for him.

Further, Charteris did not have to tell him that the tongue of Agwala would never speak again. News travels fast in the Delta even to one with irons about his wrists. And the "crudely built road to justice" which Charteris had thought of early that morning, became an accomplished fact even faster than he had anticipated.

Knowing that the tongue of Agwala could no longer order the manner of a man's death for divulging the truth, and knowing also that Agwala was now and forever helpless to defend the lives of his people with money and many lies, Doridi promptly flung himself frenziedly upon the mercy of "the gray man who never hurried," whose wisdom was the wisdom of the tortoise, and whose power was so great that even the white man's law bowed before him.

Therefore, Doridi, fearfully and terribly, told Charteris the truth, and it was not beautiful. It confirmed Charteris' own convictions on the matter; the convictions he could not prove by direct evidence until he had finally inveigled Agwala into a real display of force and had trapped him redhanded.

Doridi's story came to him mostly in Jakri, and he translated it for the benefit of the others.

Noni, also, under Charteris' guidance admitted that she knew the attack on the hulk had been made at Agwala's instigation; but when Doridi, still whining piteously in fear of his life, was dragged bodily away, Noni hesitated.

She approached Charteris closely, with one eye on Abado, and said something to him in a very low voice in Jakri. Abado heard it and started to his feet, giving vent to a raucous string of Sobo.

But Noni just moved a little nearer to Charteris and said it again, and looked up at him with her big squirrel eyes respectfully but expectantly.

A moment or two later, despite the sullen scowling of Abado, Noni departed from the library swaying lightly on her naked little feet, smiling quietly to herself.

The thing that she desired would come to pass as surely as the lifting of the sun lighted up the dark.

Had not the gray man nodded his head?

OF HIMSELF, in respect to Doridi's confession and his own interest in the affair, Charteris said but little. Certainly, none of his auditors was one whit better informed about his origin or his purpose when he had finished than when he began.

His principal object in augmenting Doridi's confession with a résumé of his own share in Agwala's downfall seemed to be entirely for the sake of setting Abado free, and the story he told was simple enough. Its ramifications were confused and far-reaching, but its essentials narrowed down to three salient facts.

First, that Agwala had been ambitious to do on his side of the trading fence what Morrison had done on his. Second, that Morrison, the colossus of the Combination, who arbitrarily dictated to the native trader what his produce was worth, stood in Agwala's way on the one hand. And third, that Abado—ever growing, ever threatening—represented both an obstacle and a menace on the other.

Agwala, therefore, had proceeded to arrange for the removal of both these difficulties at one and the same time.

And, by adopting the system of credit suggested to him, in a truly desperate mood, by a tottering independent trader at Siluko, he began to bolster the shattered fortunes of the enemies of the Combination; so that, in a competitive field, he would have the pleasure of selling to the highest bidder, when, with Abado out of the way, he would have gained control of all of the native markets within his sphere.

This was the motive. Morrison's example had put it into his head. What Morrison could do among white men, he, Agwala, could do among black. His plan was worthy of the ambition that gave it birth.

The interview with Morrison at Forcados was the first step. He had compelled Morrison to decide between himself and Abado, thereby giving Abado ample reasons for desiring the destruction of Morrison.

Then Agwala saw to it that Morrison was destroyed.

After which, as a result of careful and insidious planning in advance, Noni became the innocent agent of her father being brought suddenly and most convincingly within the shadow of the white man's rope. But for the intervention of Charteris, the plan would surely have succeeded.

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Though it was impossible, in the Benin country, to find any one who would swear to the truth against Agwala, there were, on the other hand, many thousands who would have sworn to any kind of lie for him. In other words, had Abado ever come to trial, there would have been ample evidence to prove that he had killed Morrison.

Agwala, himself, would not have appeared in the matter at all. And, if the white man's law had been hesitant about conviction, there always remained the simple subterfuge of arranging for Abado's "rescue" from the white man's jail, and of killing the fugitive in an apparently zealous effort to assist the government in recapturing him.

Charteris had heard much of the Agwala-Abado feud long before he reached Benin River. The outstanding features of it were that the native traders of all degrees of importance and unimportance, resented Agwala's effort to dominate the native markets, and regarded the trading genius of Abado as the only barrier to Agwala's perfectly obvious ambition.

But—and this, in view of the universal opinion among white men on the subject, was rather remarkable—nowhere was it said among the natives, regardless of tribe or breed, that Abado was the greater or the cleverer of the two.

Always the native said with a slight shake of the head:

"Sof'ly, sof'ly. Agwala wait li'l bit. Then—" with a most expressive shrug of the shoulders—"Abado done finis'."

Only the white man's money and the white man's law had protected Abado thus far; protected him and, at the same time, given him the opportunity to build himself up until he was a real power in the land.

Without these props, Abdao would have been as nothing, and he had wisdom enough to know it. He believed in their permanence, and trusting them implicitly, leaned heavily upon them. The manner in which he reacted when the first prop had been suddenly removed from under him by Morrison's order of boycott, proved just how heavily he had leaned. The truth had become a lie. He dropped like a plummet into despair, and made ready to die.

Consequently, he would have been a most pitiful victim in Agwala's net thereafter—if Charteris had not decided to take a hand in the grim gamble for his life.

Charteris had chanced to be in the vicinity of the native market where Abado was trading when Noni arrived with the startling information of Agwala's interview with Morrison at Forcados.

Because Abado had immediately become excited, rampaging about the market like a man on the verge of madness, the whole matter was public property almost before Doridi arrived to confirm Noni's story.

Doridi was not welcomed by Abado. He was cursed and all the breed of Agwala with him. And for about twenty-four hours, Doridi had moaned and was convincingly sad.

He had betrayed Agwala's confidence, which meant death or the alternative of being a fugitive for life, and Abado, for whom he had done this awful thing, had cursed him!

"*E-yaw! Yella! Yella! Yella!*"

Charteris, however, had not believed in Doridi's sorrow or in his fear of Agwala's vengeance, and there were several shrewd old Sobo chiefs who held the same view.

They admitted that Noni-of-the-little-feet was desirable. But there were many women in the land. And only one Agwala. He who served Agwala faithfully could possess many wives.

Also, Charteris was convinced that in a matter of such vital importance as the Forcados agreement with Morrison, it did not seem plausible that Agwala would confide in any one. Therefore, if there were any real grounds for suspicion in the affair, two questions at once presented themselves.

Why did Agwala confide in Doridi? Why did he have Doridi play the traitor's part?

The possibilities in the thing were interesting. So Charteris, having nothing better to do, made it his business to keep Doridi in sight.

Within twenty-four hours after he had been so soundly cursed by Abado, Doridi disappeared. This being the established practise among traitors in the Delta, no one expected him to do otherwise.

But Charteris, because he was watching Doridi very carefully, discovered that the "disappearance" was conducted under Agwala's supervision.

Doridi did not go deeper into the bush and try to lose himself in some far distant native village. By a roundabout route he went back to Benin River, and then, just above the Koratown curve, an hour before the dawn—in the middle of a most appropriate thunder-storm—he was met by an

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inconspicuous eight-paddle canoe that had an awning over it.

Agwala was in that canoe, and after a whispered conference, Doridi paddled away and Agwala returned to Agwala-town.

Charteris, convinced that something unusual was in the wind, took up his headquarters at Grandison's beach to keep a watchful eye upon Agwala.

He admitted that the murder of Morrison had startled him. But, from that moment, he had had no doubt of the identity of the culprit; or of the ambitious plans Agwala had in mind.

The effort to have Noni supply the evidence against her father confirmed Charteris' suspicions, not on the day Noni arrived on the yacht, but rather more than three days before that.

Charteris did not say where his information came from, and no one took the trouble to ask. Hogmanay knew how he, himself, learned forbidden things in the Delta when they were not too exclusive, and both Parker and Malkett were equally well versed in the whispering telegraphy of the bush. Charteris' sources were simply more plentiful, farther reaching and more reliable than theirs.

Enough that, from the moment that the news of Morrison's murder reached him, the war between Charteris and Agwala for the life of Abado and the freedom of the native markets from the effects of a monopoly began.

Every move Charteris had made, in trade and in the frustrating of Agwala's plans in general, had been made with the deliberate intention of goading the fat and arrogantly entrenched chief into the open.

And against the day when he would succeed in doing this, Charteris made his plans accordingly. Just as he had brought trade of a foreign cast into Benin River, so he had brought fighting men when he needed them. Abado's own contribution to this force had been a work of secret and savage glee, and it had begun on the night of the affair at Chief Roku's hut at Dowadda.

Of the fight itself, Charteris said very little. And of the preliminaries leading up to it even less. He admitted simply that when he had succeeded in "finding" Doridi, he had known that then, if ever, Agwala must be roused into real action.

Charteris had Doridi in his keeping three days before he "used" him. He knew that for some time the bush about Grandison's beach was full of Agwala's boys, pending his, Charteris', return there.

Consequently, being made aware that Agwala was due at the yacht in the matter of the attack upon the hulk, Charteris made his preparations.

He first brought Abado and the rest down from their rendezvous in the vicinity of Materri, Abado's native village, and scattered them through the creeks above the Koratown curve. They were to drop downriver immediately after dark.

In the afternoon, Charteris had deliberately staged the delivering up of Doridi to the government in a manner that was sure to frighten and hurt Agwala most.

And Agwala, beside himself with rage and fear, swallowed the bait with hardly a moment's hesitation.

"It was a nasty trick to play on a fat man," Charteris admitted almost apologetically. "But he was such a desperately hard customer to stir into action on his own account. And, of course, you never would have proved anything against him otherwise."

Parker nodded slowly. Malkett looked skeptical. Hogmanay pulled at his beard and studied Abado, who was looking from one face to the other and giving every evidence of being most unhappy in these surroundings.

"Aye," Hogmanay commented with conviction, and shifted his attention to Charteris. "He seems to appreciate ye, and ye seem to know what goes on in the back o' their uncanny minds. But, walkin' into Grandison's in the dark wi' a pack of Agwala's obliging murderers lookin' on, wasn't the act o' a sane man. So it must be that you're just as daft as they are."

Charteris laughed.

"I didn't say anything about——"

"No, man, no, ye didn't. But your trap wouldn't ha' been worth a cookie if ye hadn't baited it yoursel'. Aye, I'll admit again ye have queer notions o' enjoyment."

Parker stroked his chin reflectively. He regarded the blotter before him for a little while, then glanced abruptly at Charteris.

"I suppose we can find Abado any time if we want him?"

"Surely. He isn't going to go into hiding again. And you can't very well hold a man for fighting for his life."

"Um—no—I suppose not. And I imagine

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it would be rather hard to prove anything—definite?"

"Impossible," Charteris said with conviction, and the scream of a stern-wheeler's siren put an exclamation point behind it.

"All right," Parker said hurriedly. "Tell him he can go. And if he gets those canoes out of the river before the Waffs come up—palaver set."

Charteris, however, did not frighten Abado with the Great Dane's facetious threat. Instead he said impressively in Sobo:

"The white man's law has spoken. Abado, the elephant, is free. He can walk upon the white man's beach so that all men may see him there, and there will be no more blood. The canoes must depart sof'ly, sof'ly, and the fighting-men must return to their villages to heal their wounds. Go back to Materri. Walk straight like a man. Let the children of Abado know that the white man's law is a good law, and that the lie was a lie only for a little while."

Abado looked rather foolish for a minute, then his face took on an expression of awe.

"The power of the gray man is the power of many kings. It is good to be the gray man's friend."

"*Doh*," Charteris said simply.

"*Doh*," came the humble answer, and Abado descended native fashion upon one knee, as before a chief.

Then he rose, straightened, nodded hurriedly, but respectfully to Hogmanay and Parker, almost forgot Malkett altogether, and went hurriedly out.

The stern-wheeler screamed again just as she entered the river from the Warri creek.

Abado paused and glanced down-river; saw a small white mammy in a deck chair watching him, and, lifting his head sharply, tightened his overcloth about his waist.

He walked toward the companion ladder—straight—like a man.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE LONELY ROAD

WITHIN half an hour the great pack of canoes had melted away. There was no jubilation; scarcely a cheer.

Fran watched the mass of them spread silently out until the spaces between them grew wider and wider; and then, with a queer touch of unreality, they were gone.

Another canoe, without an awning, that had been moored at the foot of the companion ladder, was transferred into the custody of the stern-wheeler, the decks of which were brown with Hausa and Yoruba who had come for a fight and found only a remnant that could not talk.

Doridi, also, was removed to the stern-wheeler. And that, approximately, was the end of that.

A sober quiet had fallen upon the river. There was nothing of nervous expectancy in it, or anything of fear. It was the quiet of an unbelievable peace, so that even the dull, implacable face of the bush seemed to wear an easier look as if the restless spirit that lurked within, was stilled.

When Catherine, Elsie and Margaret returned to the deck, they subconsciously talked in whispers. Fran laughed at them.

"This isn't a church. And the tiptoe days are over. We're going home tomorrow."

Catherine was aware of this. She had just been in receipt of quite an illuminating amount of information from the Great Dane which precluded the necessity for remaining any longer, and she was trying hard to think of the proper thing to say when Charteris came out of the library.

Without any doubt, even in her own mind, she was absurdly afraid; more so, really, than Elsie, who mentally gaped when she thought of him. Catherine did not gape. She shivered a little and drew back, and because there was no tangible explanation for this, it annoyed her.

Margaret was just quiet; satisfied; almost purring with a new and rather dream-like contentment from which she hoped she would not suddenly wake up. Every once in a while she glanced a little nervously toward the hulk's old anchorage and blinked and looked again to be quite sure she was not making any mistake about it.

There was a slight bustle of officialdom on the *Bonny's* decks for an hour or so, and then it, too, died down into a whisper. The native police, the Yoruba orderlies and Arthur Garriman Bark, looking relieved but subdued, disappeared in the direction of the stern-wheeler.

Shortly before six o'clock, Charteris, accompanied by Hogmanay, an officer of the Waffs, and Parker and Malkett, came out of the library.

Charteris was just—Charteris. The others

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wore something of a chastened, puzzled, groping look, and Hogmanay seemed disappointed. Charteris had again eluded one of his dinner invitations. Apparently he had immediate business of some kind up-river.

He had, in the course of the conversation in the library, asked if he might talk to Noni again for a minute, and the girl being sent for, he had taken from his shirt a stumpy and none too promising looking package done up in a ragged piece of cloth. This he gave to the girl and said something to her in Jakri, then resumed the conversation where he had been compelled to interrupt it, as if nothing had happened.

Now, almost the moment he stepped out on deck, he walked directly toward the ladies without any apology or a shade of diffidence.

Catherine tried to loll back in her chair and assume an attitude of indifference as she acknowledged his greeting and indulged in the formality of conversation. Elsie said and almost felt nothing. She did not even look around for the moral support of Tommy Dillingworth.

Margaret, without being in the least aware of it, looked shy because she felt comfortably guilty. Apparently Charteris had not taken the advice contained in her note to him, but she was glad she had written it for all that.

Fran was unusually silent—aloof and alone. She did not look up at Charteris save once, and her smile on that occasion was a bit twisted and uncertain.

Charteris, himself, was simply agreeable. He said nothing that mattered and did not refer to the fight or the hectic, sleepless character of the previous night, and if he sensed the strained note in Catherine's voice—a note that sounded to her as loud as a foghorn and for which she condemned herself most heartily—he did not appear in the least annoyed or perturbed by it.

Then, still pleasantly, in a tone that was low and soft, he voiced the adieus of a gentleman, bowed and turned leisurely toward the companion ladder.

Hogmanay and Parker and the rest accompanied him there in a heavy kind of restraint that made the whole air become a little thick and choky.

Margaret rose and walked to the rail. Catherine hesitated, then followed. Elsie glanced at Fran, who showed no disposition to move, then mechanically trailed in the steps of her elder sister.

Fran sat very still, her hands in her lap, her eyes steadily cast down in their direction. She heard Hogmanay's broad accent confess a regret that Charteris could not see his way to dine with him, and then the Great Dane said something about Warri that was not very distinct.

The gleaming, silver-gray head dipped down the companion ladder and—Fran followed it.

She did not run, or push the men aside in haste or feverish anxiety. She walked across the deck, slipped gently past Hogmanay and went down the steps of the companion ladder, one by one, as if she were counting them.

Above her, the men stared and drew their brows together in puzzled wonder. Catherine, Margaret and Elsie gasped in varying degrees of astonishment. But all along the *Bonny's* rail, after a moment or two of excited comment, no word was spoken.

Below, Charteris had thrown his sun helmet into his canoe. It was no longer necessary for that day at least, as, in a very few minutes there would be no more sun.

He was stooping to loosen the palm-fiber painter as Fran reached him, and when he looked up there was no surprize in his face.

"This is very kind," he said and straightened. "What made you think of it?"

Fran caught the rope wire rail of the ladder and answered simply—

"I want—I wish I could go with you."

Charteris bowed and betrayed nothing save a gentle regret.

"I am honored. But—" and he quietly held up the single paddle—"my canoe is not a tandem."

Fran looked at the paddle, then at the canoe and finally at Charteris. She did not even wince. A small, soft laugh tinkled through the silence.

"Yes. Of course! I never thought of that!"

"And your eyes—" Charteris suggested in a low tone.

"Yes," in perfect agreement. "They would be a nuisance. "But—" her voice hung hesitant a second—"it was good of you to know about them. No one else did." She held out her hand. "Good-bye. Your last act was just a little too awful, but terribly impressive. I—I've always wanted to do things like that."

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Charteris' eyes became a deeper, kinder, softer blue. When he took her small hand, the pressure of his fingers held no hint of steel in it.

"Dreams that come true," he said quietly, "are no longer dreams. They are only drab realities."

He stepped into the canoe and pushed off. Fran sat slowly down on the bottom step of the stairs and watched him go leisurely. stroke by stroke, up-river.

The flaming sun was making ready to drop into the blackness beyond the encircling mangroves and, for a space, it seemed as if Charteris had the river to himself.

His inconsequent one-woman canoe, bobbing in the mid-stream swell, was at once the embodiment of a tremendous confidence and of a loneliness that crushed and awed. He was a world apart.

Then, as the sun slipped sharply behind the unimpressionable bush, a dying shaft of red fire flicked the silver age in his hair.

Fran put her hand quickly over her eyes and bent her head.

And the Night came down.

AMONG the ashes on Grandison's beach, Ogulo - of - the - long - arms licked his wounds and chanted droningly to himself of victory over many men's souls. In his own way, he was finding much in life that was enjoyable.

Catherine and the Great Dane also appeared to have discovered, without saying very much about it, that there was good in everything. Before the evening was concluded they were finding out that they liked the same books and sports and much the same things to eat. The rest, comparatively speaking, was simple.

Elsie spent most of the evening discussing with Tommy the absorbing question of "telling mother"; while Margaret Jardine, in the secrecy of the cabin that had been assigned to her, opened a stumpy, cloth-wrapped package that had been delivered to her by Noni, who said:

"Be grayman give me. He say I give you. Be marry palaver dash."

A "marry palaver dash" was a wedding present, but the package did not look in the least like that. Margaret thought of uncut diamonds, a gold nugget, ebony *ju-ju* beads, ivory talismans, and many other things and found—a few broken hack-saw blades!

After staring at them for a minute or two, she wrapped them slowly and reverently up in the cloth again, and as if she were performing a sacred rite, put them carefully away in a secret place.

FRAN GODDARD offered no explanations, made no apologies, and did not mourn.

For many days thereafter until the *Bonny* was within hailing distance of the Mersey, she wore wet cloths over her eyes and afterward, smoked glasses.

But, for all that, her sight was better than any of the others. In the days when her eyes were in the deepest dark, her vision was most sure.

She saw then a road that wound raggedly off into distance. There was no end to this road. Sometimes the tropical noonday sun glared blindingly upon it; sometimes it was sheeted in ice.

And along this road there walked a man. His ear was eager and he searched endlessly for the thing he hoped to find. Yet, when he found it, he was not satisfied. Always he moved on a little farther—on and on through all the ages—listening and searching and finding, but ever restless and insatiable till the end of time.

His body was lean and brown and strong, and his sinews were of iron. And though his hair was of silver, his face was ever the face of youth.

Hoary with age, yet always young, his steps were turned into the wilds of the world, and the road he traveled, he traveled alone.

Fran called him the Spirit of Adventure.

THE END

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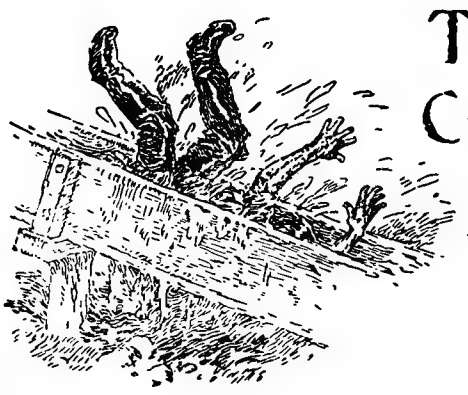

# The TAMING of COCKNEY SKELLY

by Reginald C. Barker

"IT AIN'T right," grumbled "Cockney" Skelly as he pulled off one of his hip-boots and watched the water from his sock stream across the hewn floor of the cabin. " 'Ere I 'ad seven 'undred dollars an' now I ain't got seven 'undred cents; an' all 'cause I listened to a 'oary-'eaded old blighter that should 'ave been dead an' buried twenty year ago."

"Why the grouch, Cockney?" inquired his partner, "Big Bill" Carleton as he threw open the damper of the little stove and listened for a moment to the crackling of the fire he had just kindled.

" 'Ear 'im!" exclaimed the little man, addressing an invisible listener. " 'Oo wouldn't 'ave a grouch, I arsks; an' me wet through every day wiv a 'ole in me boot the size of a 'alf-dollar?"

"Well, why in the —— don't you mend it, instead of beefing all the time?" inquired Big Bill, who was pretty well tired of his partner's everlasting whining.

"Ho, yus! I get a lot of time to mend it, I do; workin' every day up to me 'ips in mud an' water. That's all we do up 'ere in the 'ills anyhow. Just work, work, work!" complained Cockney.

"You have lots of time at night to mend it," stated Big Bill, "but instead of doing it you lie upon your bunk and grouch about things that can't be helped. You didn't have to come back to Deadwood River; but that night when we stopped at Dad White's cabin on our way out with our last Winter's catch of furs, and he told us of the little piece of virgin ground left from early days by the placer miners of Horsefly Gulch, you were just as crazy to take a chance on working it as I was. You can't deny it, either."

"Wot's the matter wiv you, Bill? 'Oo's denyin' it? But 'ow did I know we'd 'ave to move a big 'eap of stones before we got any gold? Me, wot never saw a placer mine in me blushin' life!"

"You didn't expect to pick up the gold in chunks, did you, Cockney?" asked his partner. "If it wasn't for the fact that those old-timers had to have a place to pile their rocks, we would never have got the chance to work it at all."

"If the gold is there like that old blighter says it is, w'y in —— didn't 'e get it 'imself, is wot I wants to know?" returned Cockney not altogether without reason.

"Seeing that Dad White is going on eighty years of age and all crippled up with rheumatism, it's hardly any wonder," stated Big Bill. "For my part I think he gave us a pretty good lay, only asking us to see that he doesn't go shy of his Winter's grub-stake when we make our clean-up."

" 'Spose we don't make any clean-up, as you calls it?" asked Cockney.

"Suppose that pile of boulders we're moving turns to a pile of turnips," rejoined his partner sarcastically. "Boy, do you know what the gravel of Horsefly Gulch averaged to the pan in early days?" And without waiting for a reply Big Bill continued, "From two to five dollars a pan!"

Now if there was one thing that irritated Cockney Skelly above another it was a reference to his size. Why the two had ever become partners can only be ascribed to the attraction of opposites, for Big Bill Carleton was a giant in stature, and like most large men was as good-natured as he

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was big. He had not meant anything personal in addressing Cockney as "boy," which is a common enough expression in the West. This Cockney knew, but none the less it galled him, and so he retorted:

"'Oo's a boy? Me? 'Cause you're built like a overgrown big-'eaded sunflower, you think anybody like me ain't a man. I'll show you, I will, you blushin' beanstalk, I'll——"

But Big Bill's good nature was exhausted, and the next thing Cockney Skelly knew, a big arm was stretched out and with one hand his partner grasped him by the belt and, raising him from the ground, dropped him upon the bunk.

"Be good little man, be good," said Big Bill:

Then he turned and closed the damper.

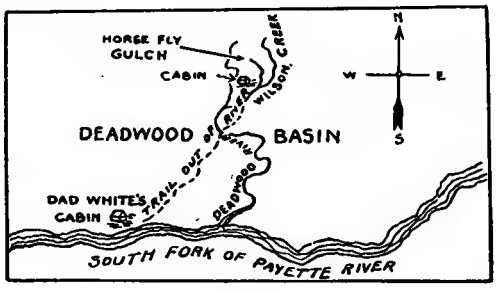
Like a great dog that having subdued a yapping mongrel by holding him down with one mighty paw and making a display of teeth, suddenly releases him and stands with slightly waving tail and lolling tongue ready to forgive and forget, so did Big Bill Carleton set about getting supper, the while humming beneath his breath—

> "Yet it isn't the gold that I'm wanting,
> So much as just finding the gold."

And like a mongrel that has been made to understand that he must not presume too much upon his size for protection, so did Cockney Skelly come to time, but he still muttered away down in his throat.

Yet deep in his heart Cockney Skelly respected his big partner, who feared nothing upon earth, not even the wild, Winter storms, and who loved the immense solitudes of the Big Hills—the Big Hills that Cockney would never understand.

From dawn to dark of each long, Spring day, seven days a week Big Bill Carleton stood at the tripod and directed the stream from the hose that connected with the old ditch they had cleaned out two hundred feet up on the mountain-side. Clear and sparkling in the sunlight the water issued from the two-inch nozzle and, draped in a veil of mist-like spray, described a great arc, the highest point of which varied from three to twenty feet above the ground, as Bill depressed or elevated the nozzle of the hose. Forty feet away was a raw, red bank of gravel rapidly disintegrating into a yellow flood beneath the tremendous pressure of the stream. This gravel was what is known as the "pay dirt"—a forgotten fragment of the virgin pay dirt of Horsefly Gulch, Deadwood River—the pay dirt of '62!




With sleeves rolled to his shoulders, Cockney Skelly stood in the muddy, yellow waters of the race, and, with an eight-tined sluice fork, threw out the largest of the water-driven pebbles that they might not clog the three sluice boxes through which the gold-bearing gravel had to pass upon its way to the tail race. Fortunately they had lots of dump or it would have been very hard to have worked the little bar without the assistance of a third man to keep the tail race clear.

Rumble, rumble, rumble! The heavy, round pebbles drove down the race, as with great, dark patches of sweat staining his blue cotton shirt, Cockney Skelly facing upstream, worked and worked—and cussed.

Walled in on both sides by bare rocky cliffs that towered hundreds of feet into the blue, Horsefly Gulch was a regular inferno of heat that, reflected from the piles of boulders left by the miners of half a century before, danced over the yellow race in shimmering, vapory waves.

Rumble, rumble, rumble! A particularly large pebble was coming down the race and Skelly with feet wide apart braced himself against the rushing stream and, with the great sluice fork poised, awaited the boulder.

Rumble, rumble!

"Come on, yer blighter, yer h'uncle's ready for yer," and rumble, rumble! the "blighter" came, and just as Cockney received the full weight of the heavy pebble upon the curved tines of his sluice fork, a horse-fly stung him upon the back of his neck! Then several things happened all at once. Cockney emitted a yell that startled a red-shouldered hawk perched upon a crag that overlooked the diggings and, releasing the handle of the sluice fork, slapped at the

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offending insect with force enough to have killed a cat.

The instant he released the handle of the fork, the force of water twisted the boulder so that it rolled between Cockney's feet; and from his post at the tripod Big Bill was surprized suddenly to see his little partner rolling down the yellow waters of the race toward the head of the sluice boxes!

It was altogether too much for Bill. Vainly he tried to hold the hose, but the sight was too funny; from sheer weakness he had to let go, whereupon the hose, suddenly released, swung around, and, of its own volition, directed its powerful stream at Cockney Skelly just as he regained his feet.

Fortunately he had his back turned, for the four hundred miner's inches of water compressed into a two-inch nozzle hit him where the most wear showed upon his overalls; lifted him clear of the race and flung him on to a patch of clean bed rock, while Big Bill writhed and rolled in the throes of uncontrollable laughter.

Slowly Cockney Skelly arose to his feet and stood for an instant a hatless, dripping figure of impotent rage. So great was his anger that it fairly left him speechless and all he could think of for the moment was to double his fist and shake it at the blue sky overhead. One glance he gave at the figure of his partner holding his sides as he called upon his Maker to witness that the sight of Cockney rolling down the race was the funniest sight he had seen in an eventful life.

At last Big Bill controlled himself sufficiently to swing the hose back into its original position, but he nearly dropped it again when he saw Cockney duck as the silver bow of water passed high above his head.

"Aye, laugh, —— yer, laugh!" exclaimed the little man. "I'll attend to yer after a bit, but I got something else ter do first."

Then Bill was astonished to see his partner wade back into the race from which he finally retrieved the sluice fork and threw it ashore. This done he cast a baleful eye to where a swirl in the water showed the boulder, that had tripped him, was lying. Reaching the swirl he plunged both arms into the water clear up to his shoulders and catching hold of the boulder, raised it in his hands and carried it out on to the bed-rock. Then he walked over to the tripod, and, without paying the slightest attention to Big Bill, picked up the ten-pound sledge-hammer that was kept upon the diggings, and with it returned to the boulder.

With his thin lips compressed with rage, and his steel-colored eyes narrowed to pin-points, Cockney swung the heavy sledge above his head and brought it down whang! squarely upon the top of the offending boulder. But the rock was hard, slick and water-washed, and the rebound of the hammer almost knocked him off his feet. Nothing daunted, he struck again and again until the yellow mud that had dried upon his face became streaked with driblets of sweat. After twenty minutes pounding, the boulder at last broke into fragments. Then dropping the sledge, slowly and methodically Cockney Skelly picked up each fragment and hurled it far down the gulch, and each piece he hurled in a different direction. This done, he pulled off his hip-boots, emptied out the water, replaced them upon his feet and, without a glance at his partner, who still stood at the tripod, waded back into the race and resumed his forking of the biggest rocks.

All this time he had not uttered a word, aud by this alone Big Bill knew that his partner was very mad, for Cockney, as a rule, was voluble in his speech.

The hot Spring day wore on and slowly the sun sank behind the peaks at the head of the gulch and purple shadows began to creep up the rocky walls. Still Cockney had uttered no word, and still Big Bill stood at the tripod and guided the nozzle that sent the silver stream hurtling above the bare bed-rock to bore its way beneath the patch of red gravel that was daily growing smaller.

It grew too dark to work, and Big Bill signaled to his partner to go up to the ditch and shut down the water-gate at the penstock and turn the water through the waste-gate, for it was three miles to the head of the ditch and the partners had been taking a chance of the ditch bank breaking during the night rather than make the trip after a hard day's work.

If Big Bill was surprized when his partner did not show the least sign of going, he did not show it; instead he turned the stream from the nozzle into the race and with a sweeping motion of the hose swept a wall of water down the race toward Cockney Skelly, who perforce had to get out or be knocked off his feet.

From the safety of the bed-rock he

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watched Big Bill sweep the race again and again and drive the accumulated gravel down to the head of the sluice boxes which were for a short time kept running almost to overflowing with the thick, muddy stream.

Still Cockney showed no sign of shutting off the water, which he had always been in the habit of doing at the end of the day. Had Big Bill been like some men, he would have turned that high-pressure stream of water upon the surly little man and brought him to time. But Cockney knew that his size saved him from being man-handled by is giant partner, who could have broken him in two with one hand.

Satisfied at last that the race was clean and would not choke up during the night, Big Bill turned the stream into the bank and somewhat wearily made his way up the hill, and soon the roar of the water died to a silence that, after the turmoil of the day, could almost be felt.

Then, and not until then, did Cockney Skelly with the water sloshing in his boots at every step, make his way to the little cabin that stood upon a worked-out bar at the mouth of Horsefly Gulch, Deadwood River.

"Sweet Saturday night!" remarked Big Bill as Cockney entered the cabin; for the day's work with its hardships and troubles over, Big Bill was ready to forget them until the following dawn.

Not so his partner; with compressed lips he spoke no word, but pulling off his boots stood them bottom-side up outside the cabin door and watched the water run out of them with a moody eye. Still without speaking he removed his socks and tossing them beneath the stove, drew on his feet a pair of brogans.

The heat of the afternoon had dried Cockney's clothes and thinking that by this time he would be feeling more amiable, Big Bill remarked again—

"Sweet Saturday night!"

"Sweet ——!" exclaimed the little man. "An' wot's more I ain't goin' ter work no more on Sundays!"

"What's that?" inquired his astonished partner.

"I said, I ain't a-goin' to work no more on Sundays," repeated Cockney.

"But, man alive," protested Big Bill. "We've got to work on Sundays. The water won't hold out over another three weeks and it's going to be nip and tuck as to whether we can clean off the bar by then, to say nothing of making the final clean-up."

"I ain't goin' to work no more on Sundays," obstinately repeated Cockney.

For a moment Big Bill closed his great fists, then with an effort he controlled himself and quietly asked—

"What kind of a man are you anyway, Cockney?"

"I ain't no man, I'm a blushin' boy to be knocked over by the 'ose any old time you think proper," stated the little man.

"Oh, ——, Cockney!" exclaimed the big miner. "So that's what is biting you. Why, I didn't go for to knock you over, but when I turned around and saw you rolling end over end down the race, the hose just naturally got away from me. It just happened that you were in its way. It's no use getting sore about a little thing like that."

For a moment it looked as tho Cockney would relent, then his natural obstinacy got the upper hand and he said sourly:

"Maybe it did, Bill, an' maybe it didn't, but it ain't only that. I'm sick of the bloomin' 'ills, wiv their 'umps an' 'ollows an' 'orse-flies. I can put up wiv 'em six days a week, all right, but w'en Sunday comes I wants to rest, and—Oh, Lord! Bill, you should 'ave seen me on a Sunday back 'ome! It's Spring back 'ome now, Bill. Of a Sunday me an' me Judy would take the train out to Epping, or Chingford Forest, an' we'd carry a picnic dinner wiv us, an' after dinner we'd wander around and fill the basket the dinner was in wiv yellow primroses, an' blue-bells, and cowslips; an' sometimes we'd lay down on the grass, an' 'way up in the hair we'd see a blushin' skylark a-singin'. That was something like a Sunday that was. Oh, Lord, 'ow I wish I was 'ome!"

That the little man was in earnest there could be no doubt. But it was not the first case of homesickness Big Bill had seen. Many a time he had known gray, old bachelors of the Big Hills to go all to pieces when the loneliness and the silence got upon their nerves.

"Well, old-timer," said Big Bill, "after we make our clean-up, I guess you'll have plenty to take you back to your primroses and blue-bells, and when you get there, and are lying watching that there skylark, you'll get to thinkin' of your old partner and you'll come back, back to the 'umps and 'ollows and horse-flies' of Deadwood River. For those who have once lived in the Big



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Hills never forget, Cockney. They may stay away for a while, but in the end they all come back—back to the Big Hills!"

"Come back," repeated Cockney. "Wot in —— would I come back for?"

"I don't know, Cockney. You won't know yourself, but something will call you away from the cities—something so strong you cannot resist it, and you'll be as eager to come back as you are now to leave."

But Cockney Skelly shook his head, for he could not understand.

THE insistent shrilling of the alarm-clock on the shelf above the double bunk awakened Big Bill Carleton in the gray of the dawn, but apparently had no such effect upon his partner, who lay upon his back with his mouth wide open, trumpeting through his nose in active contest with the whirring mechanism just above his head.

Mechanically Big Bill reached back and turned off the alarm, exclaiming as he did so—

"All right, you singing sidewinder, you just wait until after the clean-up; then I'm going to wind you up and set you to singing on top of a rock pile, and 'bout the time you get to going good, I'll take down the old forty-five and knock you the other side of Gehenna, you nickel-plated, sleep-destroying, loud-mouthed man driver!"

Twenty minutes later Big Bill dropped a spoonful of flapjack batter upon a hot griddle and yelled to the sleeper on the bunk:

"Roll out! She's all hot and sizzling and the first come is the first served. R-r-roll o-u-t!"

"Wot the —— is the matter wiv you, Bill?" came from the bunk. "Didn't I tell yer I ain't a-goin' ter work no more on Sundays, an' ain't ter-day Sunday?"

"Sure, it's Sunday, but——"

"But, nuthin'. I'm goin' back ter to sleep, an' after I've 'ad my sleep out, I'm a-goin' ter mend me perishin' boot, an' shave, an'—Ho, me h'eye! I got a 'ole lot of things ter do, I 'ave."

And Cockney turned over and stuck his head beneath the covers as though he thought that by so doing he would become invisible.

"What do you think this is, a sanitarium?" asked Big Bill. But the only reply he got was an ostentatious snore.

"I just wish you were man-size, instead of being what you are," muttered Big Bill. Then without aother word he ate his breakfast.

Reaching the diggings Bill sat down upon a pile of boulders, lighted his pipe and considered. It was a pretty hard proposition for one man to run the claim alone on account of his presence being necessary both at the nozzle and in the race. Of all the ornery, pig-headed partners, Big Bill considered he had the worst.

Then, as he sat there in moody thought he saw something gleaming at his feet, and, bending, he picked up a piece of rock about the size of his fist that was streaked and splashed with yellow metal. For a moment Big Bill gazed at it in surprize, then a thought came to him that made him slap his thigh and exclaim:

"By golly! I wonder if it would work? I've a notion to take a chance anyhow."

With these cryptic words he put the yellow streaked fragment in his pocket and left the claim.

Not until late in the afternoon did Big Bill return, and with him he brought a small sack which was apparently very heavy, for the sweat was pouring off his face in streams, as with a grunt of relief he dropped it upon the bed-rock.

The rest of that Sunday Big Bill spent in scraping out the fissures in that part of the bed-rock which had already been swept clean by the hose. The gravel and grit that he scraped out he put in a gold-pan, which, when full, he dumped into the first of the three sluice boxes.

As the shadows of night began to veil the walls of Horsefly Gulch, Big Bill did a peculiar thing. From the sack he had brought with him he took a handful of golden yellow grains and carefully sprinkled them into the fissures he had cleaned out. This done, he went up to the ditch and turned the water into the pen-stock, and soon a roar told him that it had reached the nozzle. Descending the hill he directed the nozzle toward the fissures which he had cleaned out, and by a deft manipulation of the stream, filled them with fine grit, thus removing all trace of his work.

"Well, how do you feel after a day's rest?" he asked Cockney that evening, as resplendent in a clean shirt and with shaven gills the little man set supper upon the table.

Evidently Cockney was unaware that by

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laying off he had broken faith with his partner, for chipper as an English sparrow he answered:

"Fine, Bill, fine! I done me washin' an' mended me perishin' boot, an' 'ad a good, old snooze; not 'arf I didn't. It ain't right to work every blushin' day, Bill, an' you know it. 'Ow did yer make it all by yer lonesome, eh?"

"Oh, I took it kind of easy today," replied Big Bill. "I didn't run the hose to amount to anything. The ditch bank needed attention 'bout two mile up the creek, an'—well, take it all around, Cockney, I guess you won't see much change in the diggin's tomorrow."

"I thought as yer wouldn't work much if I laid off," said Cockney. "I knew, though, it was the only way ter bring yer to time, I did; that's why I done it. It ain't right to work on Sunday, matey; it ain't right."

"Maybe not," admitted Big Bill, "but in all the placer mines as I've worked in—and I've mined from Circle City to Sonora—it is the rule to work every day as long as the water holds out. You see, Cockney, it ain't like any other kind of work. You can never figure on getting more than one hundred days' water, and most years you don't get over seventy. It all depends on the snowfall. If a fellow was to lay off every Sunday for two or three months, in rich ground he'd lose a pile of money. If it's low-grade pay dirt, he just naturally can't afford to lay off if he wants a grubstake for the following Winter. Anyhow, I can't lay around camp—gives me the willies, it does. I've got to be up and doing something."

"Just the same, it ain't right to work on Sundays," reiterated Cockney Skelly.

"Well, all right, we'll let it go at that," said Big Bill. "No use quarreling about it. If you feel like laying off, go ahead and lay off, but mind what I tell you, Cockney, when clean-up time comes and you see the yellow dust shining beneath the riffles, you'll forget there ever was a Sunday and want to kick yourself all over camp for having lost so much time."

Six days a week Cockney Skelly stood in the race and forked gravel as though his whole life depended upon it, but every Sunday he lay around camp and spruced himself up, snoozed and between times cussed the "'umps and 'ollows and 'orseflies" of the Big Hills. Firmly convinced that it was his right to do this, he would not stir out of sight of the cabin, and Big Bill soon found that so far as his partner showing up on the claim during the seventh day was concerned, he might just as well have been in—well, Boston.

When Cockney remarked each Monday morning that the gravel-bar did not show any sign of having been touched since the previous Saturday night, Big Bill admitted that he had done no sluicing, claiming that Sunday was a good day to patrol the ditch for breaks and to do odd jobs around the claim. Whereupon Cockney asserted with heat—

"Yer can go an' tell that to yer blushin' aunt; yer don't work on Sundays any more than I do, yer blighter!"

"Well, you come down to the diggings some time and see," challenged his partner.

"Oo, me? Not me. I 'as enough of it six days a week, wivout gettin' me perishin' feet all wet an' muddy w'en I'm all dressed up for Sunday. What kind of a fool do yer think I am, Bill?"

Perhaps the big miner thought him hard to name; at all events he held his peace.

Among other peculiarities of the little Cockney was the fact that he was very economical in his cooking, and one Sunday during supper, Big Bill, who had already eaten a small quantity of baked beans, suddenly paused in the act of raising a knifeload of the delicacies to his mouth.

"When were these beans cooked?" he demanded.

"When do yer s'pose they were cooked; last Summer?" was the sarcastic inquiry, and Cockney's protuberant ears fairly twitched with irritation. "They were cooked three days ago, old top."

"And been setting in this hot cabin ever since, I reckon," surmised his partner.

"Wot do yer think we are, millionaires? If yer don't want to eat the blushin' beans, yer don't bally well 'ave to, Bill."

"I ain't going to, either," asserted the big miner. "They are sour as ——!"

"They ain't no such a thing," asserted the little man.

"You taste mine," suggested Big Bill.

Cockney reached over and helped himself to a knife-full from his partner's plate and tipped it into his wide mouth, then—well, he didn't swallow those beans. Afterward a foolish look appeared upon his countenance as he ejaculated, "By —— you're right for once, they are sour as ——!"

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As he spoke he saw a sickly pallor creep through the tan of his partner's cheeks, and gripping himself with both hands, Big Bill staggered from the table gasping one word—

"Ptomain!"

That Sunday night Cockney Skelly was kept awake by the moans of his big partner, who, despite frequent doses of ginger-tea—for they had no medicine—seemed to be suffering from terrible pains in his stomach. However, toward dawn, he seemed to be a little better, and, raising himself upon one elbow, told Cockney that he'd better be getting to work.

"Wot? Leave yer a-groanin' 'ere wiv the bloomin' stomach-ache!" exclaimed his partner.

"I'll be all right in a day or two, old-timer," said Big Bill. "The water is dropping every day and if you don't get cleaned up this week——"

"This week!" exclaimed the little man. "Me clean up this week! W'y, yer don't expect to be ill a week, do yer, Bill?"

"I don't know," replied his partner. "Sometimes a case of ptomain poisoning lays a fellow up for——"

He ceased speaking, a gray pallor crept over his face and he fell back upon the pillow writhing.

The paroxysm lasted but a few seconds, however, and as Cockney handed his partner a tin dipper full of ginger-tea, he said:

"But I don't know nuthin' about cleanin' up a blushin' placer mine. 'Ow in —— would I go about it, Bill?"

"There ain't nuthin' to it," replied his partner weakly. "You just scrape and clean the bed-rock until there ain't a speck of nuthin' left on it. Once in awhile you pan the scrapings to see that you ain't missing any of the gold. You dump all your scrapings into the head of the sluice boxes, and when you get the bed-rock cleaned you take the riffles out of the sluice boxes and let in a little water. Then you fork out all the biggest of the gravel until there ain't much left in the boxes but black sand. Then you turn out the water and pan the black sand until there ain't nuthin' left in your pan but gold. You can do it easy enough. It'll take you about a week. I finished sluicing off the gravel yesterday, and now it's just a matter of cleaning——"

He stopped speaking and again he writhed in the clutch of a paroxysm of pain.

THAT evening as the sun was sinking, Cockney Skelly arose from where upon his knees he had been scraping and cleaning out the fissures and crannies of the bed-rock floor that had been washed off by the hose. His bare arms were covered with a mass of horse-fly bites and some of the vicious insects had even raised lumps upon his back through his thin, blue cotton shirt. His back ached from the unaccustomed position and the tips of his fingers were skinned where they had come in contact with the rough bed-rock.

"Ain't it just my bloomin' luck?" he grumbled. "If I 'ad worked every Sunday we'd 'ave been cleaned up a week ago, an' Bill wouldn't 'ave ate them blarsted sour beans."

He surveyed the small patch of bed-rock he had cleaned and thought of the twelve hours he would have to work on the morrow beneath the blazing sun, and he scratched at a fly-bite upon a sunburnt arm—and cussed. Then suddenly he thought of his partner's words which until then he had forgotten—

"Once in a while you pan the scrapings——"

Well, now was a good time. Of gold Cockney had seen no sign during the day, and, in his ignorance of such matters, he was sceptical regarding the richness of the ground.

Filling his pan from an uncleaned fissure, he stepped over to the race, and immersing it in the water, slowly—for he was not an expert panner—rotated the pan until the lightest of the rock scrapings had flowed over its edge. As the contents of the pan grew less, Cockney watched more closely; at last there was little left in the pan but black sand. Of a sudden Cockney's eyes almost popped out of his head, for at the tail-end of the streak of black sand that followed the water around the bottom of the pan, there appeared a tiny stream of golden yellow grains!

"By ——, 'e was right! It's richer than ——!" exclaimed Cockney Skelly.

For perhaps twenty minutes he remained squatting by the race gazing at the glittering grains. Then the fading light and the swarms of mosquitoes warned him that the day was done, and first putting the grains of yellow in a buckskin sack Big Bill had given him for that purpose, he made his way to camp.

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Each evening during the rest of that week Cockney found his partner groaning upon his bunk. To Cockney's inquiries Big Bill replied that though at times the pain seemed to ease up a little, he might not be able to work for some time.

" 'Ow do yer expect to get well, w'en yer don't eat anything?" Cockney asked.

"Sometimes I feel as if I shall never eat again," was the doleful reply. "How are you making it with the clean-up, anyway?"

" 'Oo, me? W'y I don't know as there's goin' ter be any clean up ter speak of," said Cockney. "I've panned some of the scrapin's and there ain't much of anything in 'em but sand.

"Perhaps you're losing the gold over the edge of the pan," suggested his partner, and with unexpected docility Cockney agreed.

"Maybe I am, Bill, maybe I am." But he thought of that tiny stream of golden yellow grains he had seen at the bottom of the pan.

For the sight of the yellow metal had so worked upon Cockney's mind that he found himself at times wishing his partner would not get well.

"If 'e don't, w'y, wot 'e don't know won't 'urt 'im," Cockney said to himself, as daily upon his bended knees he cleaned up the bedrock.

"If the clean-up of the sluice boxes yields as much in proportion as these 'oles in the bed-rock is doin', w'y there'll be enough gold for me to set up back 'ome as a blushin' gentleman. And after all, it ain't my fault that Bill got sick through eatin' sour beans. I didn't and I ate out of the same pot."

The following Saturday night found the bed-rock all cleaned. There only remained the sluice boxes, and yet tomorrow was Sunday, and Cockney Skelly had sworn he would not work on Sundays.

That night Big Bill began to show signs of improvement, but it was evident that he would be unable to work for several days for he still seemed very weak.

All that Saturday night Cockney Skelly tossed and turned upon his bunk, but sleep would not come. Should he break his word and work upon the morrow, or should he lay off as he had sworn to do?

But the thought of what the sluice boxes might hold became too strong for him, and in the gray of the dawn he arose. Hardly waiting long enough to make a cup of coffee and cook and swallow a couple of flapjacks, he stole out while his partner still slept.

Over the crest of Deadwood Mountain the Summer sun was rising as Cockney Skelly took the first riffle out of the head sluice box. In the gathering dusk of that Sunday evening, he stood by the cleaned up sluice boxes and stared at a bulging buckskin sack lying at his feet.

As he stood there he was thinking of his far-off home and of what the contents of that bulging sack would mean to him if he could get away with it; and Cockney Skelly knew that his chances of getting away with the clean-up were good, for his partner lay sick in the cabin!

In the gloaming, somewhere far up on the cañon wall a mountain nightingale began its song. As the silvery notes of the hidden songster rose and fell, a change came over the ugly features of the little Cockney, for to him the song of the bird brought memories—memories of his home; of the dusk of a Summer evening with a nightingale singing in a holly-hedge.

Still the bird trilled from among the rocks, and then it seemed to Cockney that the cañon faded into the distance, and in the dusk the rock piles of the placer claim took new shapes and became the carefully clipped shrubs of an old-fashioned English garden, and the patches of bed-rock between the piles became the graveled paths in that garden of long ago.

Still the nightingale sang, and out of the dark at the farther end of that old garden, Cockney seemed to see a white-walled, stone cottage with a straw-thatched roof, old and with wide eaves in which the sparrows nested. Among the flowers he seemed to stand and by his side a maid, rose-cheeked and shy. Again he seemed to hear himself saying:

"So I'm sailin' fer America termorrer. There's gold there, so they say; an' I'll make me blushin' fortune. Sue. Will yer wait until I sends fer yer?"

"Aye, lad; I'll be waitin'," she had promised. "An' if yer don't make no fortune, I'll be waitin' just the same!"

Well, he had his fortune there in the sack at his feet. All he had to do was to take it—and to leave his partner alone. Alone and sick in the Big Hills—the Big Hills that Cockney Skelly would never understand.

The thought struck him like a blow, and

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he almost flinched as he slowly repeated the words aloud—

"Alone — and — sick — in — the — Big Hills!"

A great owl flitted past on soundless wings; the song of the nightingale ceased; the vision faded, and Cockney Skelly shivered—but not from cold—and picking up the sack started for the cabin. As he stumbled through the gathering night, a sound that might have been a sob came from his throat, and he muttered hoarsely—

"I can't leave 'im alone, yer know; such things ain't done!"

" 'Ow are yer feelin', Bill?" he asked as he entered the cabin and saw his partner up and sitting by the stove.

Without awaiting a reply Cockney took down a dish-pan from the wall, and placing it upon the table, emptied into it from the bulging sack a gleaming yellow stream.

"What do yer know abaht that, old top?" he yelled, as he slapped his partner across the shoulders.

But to Cockney's unbounded astonishment his partner seemed unmoved. Then Big Bill arose from his chair and stepping to the table picked up a handful of the gleaming, yellow grains and silently watched them trickle between his fingers.

"Is that all you cleaned up?" he asked at last.

"Strike me a beautiful, blushin' pink!" Cockney exclaimed. There's fifteen pounds of gold there. 'Ow much more do yer want?"

Big Bill did not answer, but again he scooped up a handful of the gleaming stuff and watched it dribble between his fingers. Then he slowly smiled as he said—

"That ain't gold, Cockney!"

"Ain't gold be ——!" exclaimed the little man fairly dancing with excitement. "Didn't I clean it up out of the sluice boxes? I'd like to know wot the —— it is, if it ain't gold?"

"Oh, it's gold all right——"

"Then wot in —— are yer a-sayin' it ain't fer?" interrupted the exasperated little man.

"Well, you see it's gold and again it ain't gold," was the astounding reply.

"Well, can't yer say wot it is, Bill, instead of standin' there makin' noises with yer mouth?"

"It's pyrites of iron—Fool's Gold!" explained Big Bill, and opening the door of the cabin, he threw the contents of the dish-pan out into the night.

It seemed for a moment that Cockney would burst, so apoplectic looking did his features become. Then slowly his purpling visage paled and his face grew white and tense as in a husky whisper he asked—

"Do yer mean ter tell me, Bill, that we've worked all Summer among them 'orrible 'orse-flies fer nuthin, an' that there wasn't no gold there at all?"

"Sure, there was gold there, lots of it," quietly replied his big partner.

"Then wot in —— 'as become of it?" inquired Cockney.

"Here it is!"

And from beneath the bunk Big Bill took a bulging sack, and when he untied it and emptied the contents into the dish-pan, even Cockney S elly in his ignorance could see that the golden stream that cascaded against the tin was not Fool's Gold.

"I finished cleaning up last Sunday," said Big Bill, and he quietly lighted his pipe.

Slowly a light began to dawn upon the mind of Cockney Skelly.

"So yer was cleanin' up a little every Sunday, when I was a-layin' around?" he accused.

"You didn't reck'n I'd let you clean up when you failed to even notice that there was no quicksilver in the boxes, did you?" asked his partner.

Cockney evaded answering Big Bill's intimation of his ignorance of placer mining; instead, he asked—

"But 'ow did the Fool's Gold get in the boxes and in the bed-rock 'oles?"

"Ask of the winds——"

quoted the big miner. Then he added: "The hills are full of it. Close to the head of the ditch there's a ledge of it three feet across. Guess some poor fool must have thought it was the real stuff for there's half-dozen sacks full of it layin' around."

Still Cockney did not understand.

' But if yer 'adn't eaten them sour beans, yer would 'ave 'ad to 'elp me clean up, yerself," he suggested.

"The beans would not have been sour if I hadn't dumped some vinegar into them," his partner informed him.

"An' do yer mean to tell me that yer weren't sick at all?" Cockney asked.

"Sure, I was; sick of seeing you lay around and play the gentleman every Sunday when you ought to have been at work," replied his partner.

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"That ain't wot made yer turn gray in the face," objected Cockney.

"You'd get gray, too, if you'd swallowed a chaw of tobacco," replied Big Bill.

When he thought of those seven days of profitless work beneath the glaring July sun, the blood rushed to his head, and for a moment the mind of Cockney Skelly became blurred. Then his brain cleared, and the thought came to him, "Were those days profitless or had they taught him a lesson?" And again he saw himself standing in the dusk with temptation staring him in the face in the shape of what he thought to be a sack of gold lying at his feet. Again he seemed to hear the parting words of the girl who was awaiting him across the sea—

"An' if yer don't make no fortune, I'll be waitin' fer yer just the same."

Cockney looked at his big partner, then his glance shifted to the pan of gold-dust upon the table, the gold of which one-half was to be his.

In his heart he knew that he deserved what he had got, but no sign of his feelings were visible upon his face as slowly he put out his hand. As he felt the grip of his big partner crushing his work-worn fingers, he only remarked with insular stubbornness:

"Just the same, Bill, yer know perfectly well that it ain't right to work on Sunday."

# THE OLD-TIMER

***by* R. M. Patterson, Jr.**

HERE I am, an old 'un, a-sittin' on a string-piece,
A-smokin' and a-thinkin' of the days gone by;
Watchin' the steamers a-comin' in or goin' out,
Foulin' the river and a-blurrin' of the sky—
Lord! What a change has come about, thinks I,

Since I was a young chap—as trim a proper sailorman
As ever rove a block or laid a hand upon a clew—
Comin' in from Callao up this very river,
But cleaner then, and clearer, and the sky more blue,
In the old *Althea* clipper, battered, weary, overdue.

Mary, when I come ashore, told how she watched her standin' in,
Roundin' to at anchorage—her spars ag'in' the west
"Like a fowl from a long flight come back home ag'in,"
Says Mary; "fold her wings and snuggle down upon her nest—"
Drop our hook and furl our canvas—'fold our wings and go to rest.'

Mary, she's gone; and the old *Althea*
Is doin' shameful duty as a sand-barge tow.
And me, the proper sailorman, well, I'm wharf watchman,
A-sittin' here and starin' at the water's ebb and flow—
A-dreamin' of that Summer evening forty years ago.

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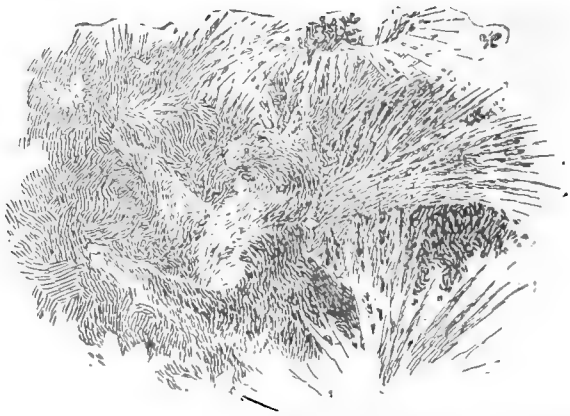

# Amigo del Christiano

## by L. P. St. Mars

*Author of "Catching a Talar," "The Outcast", etc.*

THE silence of the forest had cast its spell heavily upon all things, and only the fathomless hum of insects foiled, but did not break it.

Here and there a cascade of moonlight dropped, where a fallen forest giant broke the continuity of the roof overworld above, revealing the straight columns of the ranked tree boles shooting up and up, almost branchless, till they spread at the top. Revealing two things—live things—that ran in and out silently over the mold of the decay of ages. Scents as of musk—sickly, sensuous scent of flowers, scent of decaying wood and strange smells from wonderful fungi—filled the stagnant air.

From time to time a bat dipped in and out among the enormous stems, and a night-jar passed wavering upon hushed wing. Strange moths, giant and dwarf, played in the moonlight, and once a big, shaggy form, a giant ant-eater, almost hidden under the rampant fur of its own great tail, came and stood for a moment in the full silver glare, and faded out again.

Then a big white moth, pale as a ghost, shot all at once aloft, as a great lean, lithe, rippling form leaped from the shadows high in the air after it, dropped and—but surely it can scarcely have touched the ground—rebounded ten feet after another moth, dropping back lightly as a ball of thistle-down once more, silent as an idle thought, to roll twice over as a bubble might roll, and check rigid as the groined wood around, watching a third moth.

Then began the stalk, masterly in its minute care, miraculous in its exposition of the art of self-effacement—and all for a moth! Nay, more, when the beast, whatever it was, had caught the moth, it played with it as no kitten ever played, frolicked with it, released and recaught it and finally let it go again, unhurt—from that great, gripping paw, unhurt!

Finally it stepped out into the moonlight and halted, erect—a picture waiting for a master hand to paint.

As big as a small lioness but twenty times as graceful, fifty times as agile as any queen of beasts; colored like a lioness with the dimness of the mist; intelligent as a dog; inscrutable as a cat, fierce as a tiger, gentle as a child, swift as an antelope, patient as a snake, strong as tempered steel, soft as velvet—*Amigo del Christiano*, "the Friend of Man," the puma, cougar, *cuguacuara*—call him what you will it makes no difference. By any name he remained the same, the most perfect hunting-machine on four legs that was ever turned out of Nature's workshop—which is saying much—and the most puzzling.

He was purring a little still with the joy of the sport, as if life were for him one long frolic and the world a playground.

But suddenly the purring switched off, the muscles tensed to steel rods under the satiny loose coat, the faintest green film slid momentarily across the luminous eyes. In a word, as if at the pressure of a button, the beast had changed and one saw now the other side of *Amigo del Christiano*—the fighting side.

Something was coming down the buttress of a gigantic mora-tree—something on the war-path that wished to hide the sound of



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its own approach, but could not hide its shadow.

He who came however was not there for play. His heart had not remained young when he grew up. That may have accounted for much in the peculiar difference between the two beasts. There was something ominous about that creeping, creeping shadow, even though nothing could be seen of the maker of it.

Suddenly the puma, without moving so much as a whisker, was aware of another form upon the dappled floor of the forest. It grunted and sniffed. It was searching for nuts, plenty of which fell everywhere in those vast forests. And the puma knew that only the pig people feed, nosing about, after that fashion—in fact, a peccary.

Still, even the puma started a little at the instantaneous projection of the shadow forward. There was a streak of yellow, a short, unutterably harsh roar; a quick, startled grunt from the little pig and a horrible mix-up on the damp forest floor, all among the fantastic bloated fungi and the débris of ages.

The puma remained like a statue wrought in bronze.

The struggle ended as suddenly as it had begun—with the sudden end of the peccary. So had the peccary's single piercing squeal ended—turned off as if in a tap. But the peccary had squealed, and that with these strange little pigs meant a very great deal.

The puma looked, and saw a great yellow cat, painted all over with black rosettes, a bigger cat than himself even—heavier, more powerful in every way—crouched over the still kicking form of the peccary, whose neck he had scientifically broken. But the greatest difference between these two chiefs of the great tribe *Felis*, was in the face.

As the other turned his broad, flat-eared head slowly and for the first time sensed the puma, one saw that he had a visage of unspeakable cruelty. The beast was a jaguar, the giant of all American cats, terror of the forest, whose wicked ferocity had become a by-word.

For perhaps three or four seconds these two lords of the immemorial, trackless wilderness, of the same big tribe yet so unlike, looked one another between the eyes; but—it was the jaguar's wicked, narrowed, green glare that wavered. And for the second time that night the spotted one's evil genii—or his bad conscience, perhaps—prompted him to do the wrong thing. He flew at the puma, clean at the head of that taunting, tawny, rigid, graven image, as if the sight of *Amigo del Christiano* standing insolently there was more than his intolerant temper could stand.

What followed was peculiar. Probably the puma expected it. The jaguar should have, but rage had blinded him.

The puma was not there when the jaguar arrived. He had simply blown away like a dandelion seed caught by a sportive Summer blast. Up—aye, up over the jaguar's head, up, down on to the prey, up again and aloft on to the buttress of the nearest tree with the dead peccary in his jaws. And—but the whole forest had mysteriously seemed to fill with them at the moment the jaguar charged—there was the jaguar, fighting for his life, in the midst of a perfect torrent of little but infuriated, slashing, ripping, gnashing peccaries, who had rushed to the rescue of him who had squealed.

Pigs are one of the very few wild folk who will deliberately attempt a rescue, but the peccaries have carried the quality a step further. They are only little wild pigs with quite small tusks, and if their foes, who are many and merciless, could catch them alone always—it would soon be good-by to the clan peccary. They are not often caught alone however. They run in herds, and when together are imbued with a desperate courage and fierce loyalty and cooperation that not even the mightiest wild hunters care to face or could if they cared to. One thing only short-circuits them—they can not climb.

For this reason the puma, quick-witted and alert, not blinded by rage, had hurled himself ten feet aloft, there to stand and stare down with inscrutable eyes at the insensate riot below.

The jaguar, leaping wildly like some great rubber ball from place to place—he knew better than to stand still and face those hundred little razor-sharp tusks—beating off his foes momentarily with his heavy paws, also sprang desperately for the enormous buttress of the gigantic mora-tree. Anything, he felt, was better than staying down in that caldron of maddened piglets—even facing the puma.

But the jaguar had hardly bargained for what he found up there—even though in a sense he ought to have expected it.

The puma was half-crouched far up on a

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giant root or rather a conglomeration of roots, sniffing at something spotted that lay dead there in the moonlight. Any wild folk with half an eye could see that the something was dead—the white belly-fur glimmered uppermost, the sign of death in the wild.

But it was the puma the jaguar was watching. Even though he had his back turned, the former looked so very awful. His muscles were knotted. His fur stood on end. His very long tail—three feet two inches out of the eight and a half feet that he measured in total length—was lashing so terrifyingly.

Then the puma turned his head—slowly. He seemed to have no ears, for they were flat. His fangs were a little parted—shining like knives. His lips were rolled back. But his eyes were shooting fire—even the jaguar sat back on his haunches before those terrible orbs and half-raised one powerful paw as if to guard a blow.

The something at which the puma sniffed was the dead body of his own cub—his only cub. The cubs, unlike their parents, are spotted, by the way.

Now, it is unquestionably true that *Amigo del Christiano* did know his own cub, although he had not been perhaps the best of fathers. Still, for a puma—for any cat—he had been a more attentive sire than most. Animals, even wild ones, possess individual characters, which some scientists and hunters would deny them. This was a trait in *Amigo del Christiano's* character. Perhaps it is more common than man's slender understanding of the wild ways leads him to suspect.

At the same time, had he cared a little more, that cub's sister would not have died in the coils of an anaconda—the world's largest snake—nor his brother *via* an alligator. Had he cared a little less, he would not have done what he did then; for the risk of it, the extreme risk, was obvious to any one.

I said the jaguar half-raised his terrible paw, talons unsheathed, ready. It was useless. The puma did not come that way. *Amigo del Christiano* never did come the way he was expected. That was his boast. He did not seem to come any way at all.

He was—there. *Bash! Bash!* He was not there.

He was yards away—and the jaguar was reeling round and round and down upon his legs, clawing at the side of his own face, which had received a double cuff from *Amigo del Christiano* such as it is given to very few to receive—and live. Yet the whole thing had taken place with such lightning rapidity that the eye, even the jaguar's eye, so many, many times quicker than man's, had found only time to blink, and no more.

Then the puma removed, at leisure, without either cub or prey but marvelously agile, leaping, light as a feather, noiseless as a fantom, from overarching root to root, buttress to buttress, taking jolly good care seldom to touch the ground, or when he did, merely to spurn it and rebound again upward.

He had a wholesome respect for peccaries in bulk although none at all for them in detail; though what was happening to the jaguar at that moment among them, he neither knew nor cared to know. Judging by the sounds—for the jaguar is a noisy beast—it was something very unpleasant indeed.

*Amigo del Christiano* had work to do, and it had just struck him that now was the time to do it "or forever hold his peace."

TWO HOURS later the puma, a very wraith of the mist—for his was a lighter pelt than that the lioness carries—was sliding into a dense patch of *mocca-mocca* arum lilies. He hated the twelve-foot clubbed palisades horribly; but he hated losing his mate still more; and her lair was, or had been, in there.

What had struck him two hours ago was that, though hunting more or less in her vicinity, scenting her trail pretty often, he had scarcely seen his mate for months. Whether this was purely selfish male neglect on his part or mother jealousy on hers, remains in doubt.

The fact was clear now, however, that he burningly desired to see her, felt an empty void of utter loneliness without her. And after the death of the last cub she might want him, might feel a lonely void also. Suppose another male puma should turn up to fill it? He folded back his ears and drew down his upper lip in a gentle snarl at the thought.

But the *mocca-mocca* thicket proved empty—of all save a big "bull" alligator who bellowed, and a few thousand ants that bit. The puma, however, scented where

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the secret, cunning, demoniacal jaguar had crept upon the hidden puma cub, apparently when the mother beast was away hunting; had slain and vanished with the poor little fellow, like the blood-thirsty murderer he was. The blood smell was still upon the leaves for a wild beast—none other—to detect. Probably the spotted one had taken his prey to the tree-tops, leaping from branch to branch, to break his trail from the surely following mother.

Again *Amigo del Christiano* permitted himself a snarl—not perhaps so much on behalf of the cub now, as against his lifelong foe. No man, by the way, has ever unraveled the meaning of that amazing blood feud that certainly exists between the jaguar and the puma.

As a matter of fact, this puma was beginning to fall in love with his own wife, all over again. It was absurd perhaps, but delightful, so exactly what one might have expected of this puzzling beast whose heart always remained young, and whose affections it seemed never grew old. Married couples, please note—play, just play.

Then *Amigo del Christiano* really trailed. What went before in the scenting line counted for nothing, for his mate seemed to have been seized with the *Wanderlust* after the death of her last cub; or perhaps it was some instinctive desire to lay her trail as far and wide as possible, to increase the chance that a mate—any mate, in her present mood—should chance upon it and fill her loneliness. Not that the trail really went far; it always came back to the vicinity of her own hunting-ground in the end; but in the course of one night it had really wandered in and out an amazing distance. The loose, springy lope of the big cat was really no child's play to follow in that wild country, and of course *Amigo del Christiano* was at first one night behind, so to speak, though at his swift, long, silent trot he made it up in the end.

In the triumphant wonder of dawn when with a clash the gray arena gates of day were unbarred and let in the golden, blinding chariot of the sun, *Amigo del Christiano's* tail might have been seen vanishing into a thicket of marantas on the edge of a clearing. The huge-billed toucans were barking in the trees, mobs of brilliant parrots and still more brilliant macaws were streaming by overhead; red, howling monkeys were "drumming-in" the day; and jewels of fabulous worth—they were humming-birds really—were dazzling all eyes that tried to follow them—and failed—around great, waxy, crimson, purple, cream, white, and golden flowers.

And *Amigo del Christiano* was tired, but he must play. No one would play with him willingly, so he stalked a huge black-and-yellow butterfly, and patting that down lightly, gamboled with it for ten minutes, let it go again, and, rolling up, after a cat's lick and a promise of more anon, went to sleep.

It is true that later in the day when the deafening chorus and riotous joy of dawn had collapsed under the heat, a sapajou monkey discovered and made grimaces at him. But that was no matter, because the sapajou's face was a grimace anyway without being made one, and this one kept silence, being afraid of waking one whose other name was agility incarnate.

The first evening boom of the howling monkeys, the first drone of the nightjars and grunt of alligator, found the puma's onyx eyes glaring in the marshaling shadows. He cleaned, he drank, he started upon the war-path.

But first he must play. He played with an armadillo this time, which tortoise-like mammal shut himself up in himself, so to speak, and resigned his plated personality to the worst. He made quite a nice football, but he did not bounce—the puma tried.

Thereafter began the trail, long, swifter than it looked, silent, untiring.

The evening hubbub of the forest wild folk, "changing guard" from day to night haunters, had resigned itself to the tireless, rather pleasing hum of the insects; the moon had climbed slowly to her top hole and shone, placid and cold; and a wild dog very far away was howling at her at fifty-second intervals when a cry rang out through the silent, empty gloom of the forest that petrified *Amigo del Christiano* as if at the wave of a magic wand, in his tracks.

It was the sort of sound, a scream, that clutches one over the heart with icy fingers, and makes one's skin tingle all up and down one's back. But the puma knew who it was. It is hardly likely that any of the wild folk had heard him screech after that or any fashion—he was a silent individual; but he knew his mate's voice when he heard it, though it may well be that he had never

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heard it before. He was hearing it now anyhow, and after his one frozen pause it hurled him forward as if he had the bound of some giant released from a leash.

Nevertheless, it was still an hour before *Amigo del Christiano* found his mate. He had to go out to the forest on to the pampas to find her. He had to go into a wire corral. He had to go— Fangs and bared talons! What did she think she was playing at—through a calf-pen, full of calves unhurt, which she had used as an ambush to stalk?

The thunder of a stampede is unmistakable. Flying hoofs came whirling past the pen. Manes, tails, hoofs, foam, dust, shot by *Amigo del Christiano* as he sprang out. A shadowy, sinuous form was just bringing one fine colt to the ground—with a cleanly broken neck; a terrible jockey of the night, in very truth. And the puma knew that form, saw her eyes glint fire—his mate.

*Amigo del Christiano* executed one leap into the chaos and the choking dust—one leap of twenty feet; and the end of that leap was the end of a horse. He was alongside. He was upon its shoulder. One paw gripped its nose. Its head wrenched round and down. It fell heavily upon its twisted face—sidewise. It was dead; almost without a scratch—in fifteen seconds, dead. Thus *Amigo del Christiano.*

The two pumas at once dragged their prey to the calf-pen. They must take it to shelter of some kind; 'twas a tribal custom, and the calf-pen was the only shelter in sight. And even as they did so the drumming of another galloping horse, a lone one this time, "froze" them—flat, utterly flat, together.

Quickly the sneak moon gave up the horse—and its rider. The Indian bronco shied at smell of blood, or puma, or both, and the man said, "Ah!" in the tone of one who completely understands; and, dismounting, he hitched his horse to a post. Then he advanced, slowly, alone, on foot. The moon gleamed down a revolver-barrel as he did so. It was as if a beast had bared his fangs.

But no beast had bared its fangs. *Amigo del Christiano* lay where the alarm had first found him beside the dead horse. His mate alone detached herself from the ground and faded soundlessly, like a puff of mist, into the moon haze. The other puma himself never moved. He could not—or he thought he could not, rather; he was against a corner of the barbed-wire fence.

The man walked straight up to him, and the puma sat up as he came. There was no anger upon *Amigo del Christiano's* leonine countenance, no ferocity, no snarl broke from him; he growled not, nor were his fangs bared.

The man walked right up to him, raised his revolver, aimed carefully between the gleaming cat's eyes and pulled the trigger.

*Snap!*

That was all. No report. No flash of flame. The cartridge had misfired. They will occasionally if they are stale, about one in a few hundred; but the revolver held five more.

The puma never moved. He simply gazed meekly up into the man's face.

The man never moved for a space either. He simple gazed wonderingly down upon the great fierce cat.

Then the man slipped his revolver back into its holster and walked away to his horse.

"No, by gosh, I can't!" he muttered. "*Amigo del Christiano*—and well is the beggar named. It is more than a superstition; it is a fact. Perhaps I shall need his friendship one day!"

TWO HOURS later the injured jaguar found the man with a sprained—or broken—ankle, lying upon the ground. The Indian pony had gone half-mad on smelling puma and blood almost directly after he had mounted it, and had thrown him so that he lay actually within sound—'twas not a nice sound—of the pumas as they fed. They had gone now—at least so it seemed.

The man had heard the jaguar coming almost an hour before he came—a noisy brute, given to horrible, blood-curdling roars. Now he saw it—or he saw its eyes rather—two "lightning bugs," or fireflies, he thought they were at first—circling him, gradually closing in.

And the man's revolver had become choked with sand as he fell.

"Some hope!" he whispered to himself, then lay perfectly still.

At length the eyes focused, fixed, shot toward him.

"The end!" he mumbled half-aloud; and so it was, but not the end he expected.

The moon showed a dusky form hard

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upon the spotted terror's heels, but more graceful, moving faster; showed, too, the jaguar's sudden realization of the fact; showed, also, the ground plow up as he fetched round from charging man to facing charge of beast; and showed finally the awful convulsion of savage, steel-hard bodies as the two big brutes met.

No one can even guess what happened after that, not even the man; for the second beast was *Amigo del Christiano*, and when he fights 'tis useless for the eye to follow. The man thinks perhaps he swooned, for it seemed to him he saw half a dozen pumas. In reality, as the tracks showed, there was only one at first, and but two later, when the puma's mate joined him.

The illusion was the puma's little star turn. He multiplied himself; he became AGILITY in capital letters. He could not afford to grapple the jaguar; that way lay death. Perhaps he was fighting for his mate's eyes to see. Certainly he fought like a lambent flame, and—that was when he had leaped upon the back of the jaguar—his mate flashed in to help him.

The next thing the man remembers was that the two pumas were playing like kittens all around him, even jumping over him, gamboling, frolicking, behaving like gay, care-free children but never making any attempt to hurt him. Indeed they liked his company, and friendly showed that they did.

The man was found next day. What was left of the jaguar was found, and shot, later. *Amigo del Christiano* was never found. His tracks, and hers, led back to the vaulted sanctuary of the primeval forest, the abode of mystery and strange beasts and birds and reptiles, that has guarded its secrets well throughout the uncounted ages—and guards them still.

# THE "PEPPERBOX"

### *by* Lewis Appleton Barker

THE "pepperbox" was a heavy, clumsy weapon, made in both percussion-cap and cartridge form, in which cylinder and barrel were all one, and which was capable of firing from three to six—or even more—shots. Its name is derived from the resemblance its muzzle, with its several round holes, bears to a salt-cellar or pepperbox of certain type.

The principle is as old as gunpowder weapons, the writer having seen a Chinese wall-gun (1300) the barrel of which was two feet long, turned by hand, with three barrels bored in one solid piece of metal. The principle was attempted in flint-lock weapons in the eighteenth century, a very interesting specimen having belonged to Lord Lovat, who was executed for his part in the Stuart uprising of 1745.

This pistol fired eight shots, with barrels that would unscrew separately, and had but one cock and frizzen—the battery, the striking of which by the flint produced a spark and ignited the powder.

But it remained for American gunsmiths, in the early percussion days of about 1830, and up to 1870, to turn them out to any extent. It is needless to say that they were far from accurate.

From three to six barrels, smooth bore, were bored in one piece of steel, revolving on a central axis, usually turned by the action of cocking, thus bringing each nipple in turn under the hammer.

They were loaded at the muzzle with powder and ball, and fired by means of a percussion cap, in some cases the nipples being protected by a shield, in many cases not. The six-shooters were very heavy.

There were no sights. The trigger was usually of the ring variety with a flat hammer, and was self-cocking. The principal maker of these was Ethan Allen. (Allen & Thurber, Grafton, Mass., 1837-42; Norwich, Conn., 1842-47; Worcester, Mass., 1847-56; Allen & Wheelock, Worcester, 1856-65.)

They were sometimes as long as ten inches with a six-inch barrel, although the average was eight inches with four and one-half-inch barrel. Very occasionally the flat hammer

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would have a small hole at its base through which to sight as the hammer rose in cocking.

Another variation was a plain trigger with a spur guard. A pistol of six inches with a three-inch barrel, firing five shots, was the popular pocket size. This had an ordinary trigger and guard. The caliber varied from .30 to .39.

More rarely was to be found a four-barreled one, and even a three, the latter of which was the only one whose barrel was turned by hand, and which revolved from left to right as well as from right to left. Still more rare was one with an ordinary pistol hammer in place of the flat one, and which, hence, was not self-cocking.

One D. H. Hilliard, a gunmaker of Cornish, N. H., who flooded his territory with guns, rifles and pistols with the cap nipple and hammer underneath the barrel, which could be produced more cheaply and was supposed to have an advantage in sighting, is probably responsible for the fact that Bacon & Co., of Norwich, Conn., produced such a type of pepperbox; but as they are rarely met with it is to be presumed that they were not popular.

The pepperbox pistol was also produced abroad in England, Belgium and France, but as a rule with separate barrels, from four to ten in number, that might each be unscrewed from the frame.

Later, in cartridge days, a French one was made, carrying a pin-fire cartridge and with a folding trigger, that had every appearance of a revolver without a barrel, firing directly from the cylinder.

A very interesting one of this type, and on which the maker does not seem to wish to put his name, is a foreign one, the butt of which, folded up, forms brass knuckles, and which has also a wavy-bladed dagger that could be unfolded to the front.

The only percussion pepperbox that deserves to be remembered, and which was really an excellent pocket gun of the period, was manufactured by Robbins & Lawrence of Windsor, Vt. It was patented in 1849.

This weapon, which was nicely finished in plum brown steel, finely engraved, and of different lengths and calibers—and which was the solitary one with rifled barrels, both barrels and riflings being five in number—unscrewed a little more than half-way down the barrel, so that it could be loaded at the breech, then broken downward for the purpose of adjusting the caps, which were thus protected.

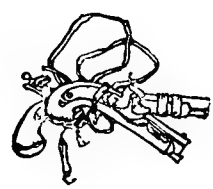
The concealed hammer did the revolving to strike the different cap nipples, the barrel remaining stationary, giving far greater accuracy. It was hammerless, and was cocked by a ring trigger, fitting directly in front of which and curving just the opposite direction from an ordinary trigger, was the firing-trigger. It also had both front and rear sights, and was the only pepperbox of its day capable of any precision.

After the introduction of metallic cartridges, the Bacon Arms Company produced a six-shooter of .22 caliber with a three-inch cylinder turning on a removable pin; Sharps, one of four shots, .31 caliber, the barrel of which slid forward so as to load at the breech, the hammer having a revolving pin that struck each barrel in turn; and the Remington Company, a five-shot, .22 and a four-shot .32 caliber, hammerless, with ringed trigger, that broke downward to load.

As a vest-pocket weapon this latter is superior to anything of its size and caliber today, the .22 firing five shots at close range in two seconds and a half.

A four-inch pistol, very popular with crooks, was one with a seven-shot cylinder, .22 caliber, on a removable pin, the butt of which formed a single brass knuckle, and was inscribed—

MY FRIEND.



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# KING HIGH

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By F. R. Buckley

*Author of "Yellow Treasure," "Kavanagh the Florentine," etc.*

"KING" JAMES was sitting at the receipt of custom with a bandage about his head, staring down the long, empty, lamplit expanse of the Gold Creek Temple of Chance, fingering the gilt-wrapped packs of cards on the table before him—and thinking. It was early; the boys from the surrounding ranches had not yet arrived for their weekly assault on the immutable laws of chance; and, according to precedent, King James should still have been in the parlor of his little frame house in Dead Man's Row, reading out of what "Juggernaut" Carr was accustomed to call "a furrin book."

This evening, however, he had not waited to be summoned by the news that the faro hounds were gathered together. Juggernaut had scarcely got the table swept clear, the oil-lamps lighted, and the packs of cards arranged before the dealer's seat, when James had stalked in—the finicky neatness of his dress marred by this astounding bandage—sat down, and had fallen into this ominous reverie.

For ominous it was. The long, grave face of the gambler bore no traces of a frown or a scowl—King James, although less than a year in Three Pines Valley, was known as too dangerous a man with gun, knife, and bare hands to need to patronize the conventional methods of self-expression. His thin, sensitive lips were pressed together a little more tightly than usual, the left corner of his mouth drooped a trifle, and his gray eyes, instead of their normal vivacity of outlook, had a strange fixity. Microscopic differences, to one who did not know King James; but to Juggernaut Carr, who knew him well enough to stand behind him during faro games and to shoot over his shoulder when necessary, they were storm signals of appalling intensity. For perhaps ten minutes Juggernaut teetered on the back legs of his chair in a pitiable condition of apprehension, uncertainty and silence; then, suddenly his nerves proved unequal to the strain. Letting himself forward on to four legs again with a crash, he addressed his master.

"If it's them Vigilantes, boss—" he began threateningly.

"Shut up," said King James.

The gray eyes turned, however, on the man who had spoken and considered him, as if the King were refreshing his memory of his prime minister's physique and armament; and Juggernaut accordingly inflated his blue-clad chest to its full forty-four inches while, with a forced yawn and stretch, he also allowed his unbuttoned vest to slip away from the shiny holsters that nestled under his arms.

"But after all," the gambler continued, "I guess I might as well tell you. If there's any trouble worth mentioning, you're bound to be in it, and you're worthy of better things than to be plain cannon-fodder."

"Cannons?" gasped Juggernaut. "My God, boss, you ain't been startin' somethin' with the army, have you?"

Suddenly King James smiled; a surprizingly good-natured, cheerful smile to appear without warning on that lean, rather sad face. And relaxing the tense attitude he had held since he entered the Temple of Chance, he crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair.

"No—I can't tell you exactly who has

"*King High*," *copyright, 1922, by F. R. Buckley.*



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started something with me," said King James slowly. "May be the Vigilantes—may be a bad loser—may be somebody who knows too much—but it wasn't the army, Juggernaut. As far as I could make out in the dark, it was one young man, dressed very much as you are."

"What were you doin' in the dark?"

King James balanced one pack of cards delicately upon another.

"Having turned the game over to you," he said, "I was taking a little ride on my horse—in the general direction of the Stony Springs Ranch. The night was fine, the air was balmy, the moon shone in a highly conscientious manner, Juggernaut; and in various sections of the sky, Mercury, Mars, Venus, Orion, the Great Dipper, the Little Dipper, Charles' Wain, and the rest of the gang, were twinkling as usual."

Juggernaut folded his arms on the table and stared into King James' face.

"Are you kiddin' me?" he asked simply.

"Only fools," said King James, "are serious about serious matters. And this is a very serious matter, Juggernaut. Because, in addition to the natural phenomena already catalogued, I shortly observed the peculiar spectacle of the mistress of Stony Springs out for a ride with her foreman, the notorious and entirely abominable 'Pug' Lowe."

"Then it was the Vigilantes!" growled Juggernaut. "Say, boss, hurry up. The boys'll be here in a minute. An' if they get here before you tell me who's who, how'm I goin' to plug——"

"You'll reserve your fire until called upon," said King James icily. "This is my business, and when I want help I'll ask for it."

"I don't see," the big man muttered, "what interest you got in that Ransome girl, anyway; a proud, haughty piece of goods like she is——"

"You remember, a little while back," said King James, folding his hands, "my mentioning the possibility that somebody knew too much."

Juggernaut nodded.

"Well, if you knew the reason for my interest in Miss Ransome," said King James mildly, "*you* would know too much. And that I am sure would be as unpleasant to you as to me. Yes. But to proceed. In addition to being head of the Vigilantes, and accordingly a personal enemy of mine, Lowe is—to make a pun—a low ruffian, and therefore no companion for a proud but inexperienced young girl."

"If she was satisfied—" began Juggernaut.

"In your extreme youth," said King James, "you, Juggernaut, were doubtless satisfied to lick the aniline dye off your toys. But your elders objected. Similarly, I rode up to Miss Ransome and Lowe, mentioned my views and suggested that if Lowe cared to go home right then, I should be pleased to escort Miss Ransome myself."

"On her own land—own foreman—you suggested *what?*" gasped Juggernaut.

"Just that. And Mr. Lowe after an argument in which he threatened to hang me next week, and I promised to shoot him right then—Mr. Lowe, I say, went home."

Juggernaut's china-blue eyes stared with an expression of horrified amazement.

"Then when did you get that wallop on the dome?" he asked.

"About ten minutes later," said King James slowly. "When the young man of whom I have spoken, suddenly appeared and asked Miss Ransome if I was annoying her. And she—God forgive her!—said I was."

He paused, unfolded his hands and reflectively overbalanced the packs of cards he had built up.

"Well?"

"There was a fight," said King James.

"And——?"

With a series of Indian war-whoops and a joyous clatter of hoofs, a party of prospective faro-players turned into the main street of Gold Creek. Automatically, King James put the unopened packs of cards in straight rows before him.

"He won. When I came to myself, he was gone, so was Miss Ransome; and Augustus Cæsar was cropping the grass under my right ear."

"And is that all about it?"

King James smiled, and the left corner of his mouth took a deeper twist downward.

"Until I meet the young man again—yes," said he.

And at this moment, with a fling-open of the door which made all the lamps in the room gutter and smoke, the first players of the evening burst into their paradise. They were boys from the Bar T—"Two Toes" Trotter, "Pie-Face" Lammermoor, "Rabbit" Roberts, and "Mystery" Mulligan among

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them; each with a month's wages in his belt and the light of battle in his eyes. There was a scramble for seats at the green baize table.

"Some like poker, some roulette, and some Swedish banker, even," said Pie-Face Lammermoor, as he spilled Rabbit Roberts out of a favored seat, "but I am the faro kid. There's a ring around the moon, my left foot itches, and every dollar I got was minted in a leap-year. An' it's the seventh day of the seventh month; and I once knew the seventh son of a seventh son that sold me all the luck that was comin' to him for a 1777 penny. Say, boss, who in time's been carvin' you up?"

King James looked at him.

"The chips," he said, "are red, white and blue, and the prices are as usual. Can I sell you some?"

Pie-Face blushed.

"Shoots the lot," he mumbled, emptying his belt on the table.

In an embarrassed silence which lasted up to the moment of Rabbit Roberts' rapturous howl over his first coup, the game began.

Gradually, while the faro cards riffled and slapped, the hall filled up. A waiting list in the flesh encircled the table where King James sat impassively collecting the bank's inevitable eight per cent. of all money staked. At eight o'clock, summoned by a deputation of punchers with a penchant for the more machine-like forms of play, "Slimmy" Hoffman wandered casually in, adjusted a green shade over his eyes, patted the flat automatic which lay along his thigh, and gave the roulette wheel a preliminary spin.

"All aboard—all aboard—all aboooard!" he advised in a high nasal wail. "No wires, no strings, nothing up the sleeve. All action personally directed by the classical goddess Fortuna, gentlemen, the lady in the sweet smile and the Summer-weight underwear, who pos-i-tively knocks only once at a door, except in the case of roulette patrons, on whose portals she keeps on hammerin' so long as they can buy chips. All abooooord!"

The blue-gray smoke from half a hundred cigarets swirled above the crowd and made aureoles about the swinging oil lamps. Just below this stratum white, yellow, and black Stetsons, pinched to the conventional peak, nodded together as their wearers swapped range-news and discussed the various vagaries of Lady Luck; broad shoulders, their blue and khaki splashed with the flying ends of gay-colored neckcloths, pushed and jostled paths toward the shrines of faro, roulette, monte, or Swedish banker, and the thick, hot air quivered with the clash of many-pitched voices, above whose social roar there rose continually, on the wings of perfectly unrestrained emotion, bursts of profane delight or despair from the men around the tables.

King James, cool-looking and collected amid his perspiring devotees, raked in, paid out, and looked at Pie-Face Lammermoor.

"Am I correct in thinking," he asked courteously, "that you have played enough for tonight?"

"Unless you'd take my clothes as collateral," Pie-Face answered sadly.

King James shook his head.

"Decency before pleasure," he said. "But—what I was going to say—when Mr. Lammermoor leaves, would you gentlemen mind leaving his seat empty? I have a particular reason for keeping an eye on the door."

"Here's your hat—what's your hurry?" mumbled Pie-Face, rising.

"None at all," said King James. "Waiting is my strong point."

"If it's them Vigilantes—" began one of the men around the table.

"I thank you for your kind offer of assistance," said King James. "Anybody want any chips?"

Pie-Face Lammermoor arose and reluctantly buttoned the empty pockets of his belt.

"I hope nobody chokes, or anything," he said darkly, staring at Two Toes Trotter, whose luck was running high.

And, timed as exactly as a theater-curtain is timed when it rises on a scene of action, the removal of his six-feet-by-three of opacity, disclosed to the eyes of King James the entrance of three men at the doorway. Two of them he knew—they were punchers from the Rising Sun outfit, away beyond the Stony Springs ranch; but it was upon the stranger who accompanied them that the gambler's attention was fixed. He was a young man, tall, lithe and red-haired, with a long, plain face noticeable chiefly for its expression, which, saving for a suggestion of humor about the corners of the mouth, resembled more than anything that of a fighting bantam. Not that the young man's



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nose, though thin and rather prominent, at all reminded one of a beak; not that his red hair, which was inclined to stand upright, resembled a comb. The likeness was more subtle. It was in his general bearing—in his quick jauntiness of movement, his bright-eyed interest in his surroundings, his pervading air of willingness to try anything once, especially if it involved fighting—that the stranger called to mind the little warrior in feathers.

"Say, boss, how about another deal?" asked Two Toes Trotter.

King James smiled and, without removing his eyes from the trio in the doorway, broke the seal of another pack of cards. Out of the side of his mouth, he shot a question at Juggernaut Carr.

"Any strangers at the other tables?"

Juggernaut shook his head.

"Go an' fetch that guy in the doorway," said King James. "Gently! But bring him here."

Juggernaut pushed his way out through the crowd. Scarcely was the next lay-out of cards on the table when he reappeared. With the three newcomers, he stood at the place left vacant by Pie-Face Lammermoor's departure.

"Sit down," said King James, looking at the red-haired young man.

The stranger shook his head.

"I don't play," he replied in a soft drawl. " 'Bliged, all the same."

King James hesitated, his finger-tips resting lightly, consideringly, on the green baize before him. Smiling, his eyes very keen, the gambler seemed to be appraising something—perhaps the sound of the young man's voice.

"Sit down and watch then," he said. "Juggernaut, put the chair where the gentleman can reach it."

It was not the conventional placing of a chair. The front of the seat caught the stranger behind the knees, and a heavy hand on his shoulder pressed him to a sitting position. King James, staring down the table, saw the look in his guest's eyes take on a new intentness—a quality of apprehension, but by no means to be confounded with fear. And, as he distributed chips to those who were clamoring for them, the gambler noted that this look intensified as the red-haired young man saw the bandage that encircled his host's forehead.

"Everybody comfortable?" said King James, using the stereotyped formula for asking if all bets were placed. His eyes, however, were on the young man with the red hair; who at this moment rose.

"If you'll excuse me, I ain't," he said in a drawl even softer and slower than he had used for his first few words. "I don't play, an' I ain't interested in play. I'm down here lookin' for a man, an' I can't look for him from this here seat."

King James also rose and with the fingertips of his left hand outspread on the table, faced the young man across the scattered cards. His right hand, strangely rigid, rested on his hip. The lurid light from the lamp above struck down over his rugged face.

"Meaning that I annoy you?" the Southerner asked

"I wouldn't say '*annoy*'——"

For the incalculable fraction of a second, there was the hollow rasp of metal against leather; and then, with one accord, the punchers about the table disappeared from their seats. Some ducked under the table, some tumbled back out of their chairs as the rank of standing men behind them dispersed at a run. The chatter which had filled the room came to a dead silence. All eyes turned to the grim tableau at the faro table where, a heavy revolver in a steady hand, King James was covering the young man at the other end of the board.

"It would be better if you hadn't said 'annoy,' " said the gambler, "because that Southern accent of yours makes you pronounce it in a way that can't be mistaken. Stand away from behind the gentleman, Juggernaut."

The big man slouched away.

"Well," said King James. "I'm the man you were looking for, I guess. What have the Vigilantes got to say to me?"

There was a growl from half the throats in the room. The two men who had accompanied the stranger to the Temple of Chance and who had stood close at his sides, as etiquette demanded when peril was toward, stepped back. A friend was a friend, to be defended to the last shot; but a member of the Vigilantes was in a directly opposite position. Most of the older men present—these two among them—had served on the Vigilance Committee before law and order came to Gold Creek County; before Old Bill Garfield, with his sheriff's badge and his wooden leg and his misleading appearance

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of benevolent senility had made lay trials and hangings superfluous.

For this reason they, even more than the younger men, detested the criminal organization which had sprung up in the last year, taking the name of the old frontier expedient, with the obvious intention of administering its own idea of law over the heads of the regular officials—and administering it to suit itself.

"I ain't a member of the Vigilantes," said the young man with the red hair.

"I won't call you a liar," King James answered him, "but I'll just ask you this: After I'd hammered the tar out of a Vigilante last night, why did you come up and give me this?" The gambler's left hand touched his bandage. "Eh? Talk quick, boy. Do you deny doing it?"

"No," said the young man, through his teeth. "And I'd do it again."

King James' eyes narrowed.

"Would, eh?" he asked softly.

"Just mention any names that were mixed up in last night's business," whispered the young man, a peculiar transparent pallor driving the tan out of his cheeks, "and I'll break your neck within thirty seconds, mister."

"Well, suppose," said King James, "I just call your bluff and say Pug Lowe. What about it then, eh?"

The young man gave no sign of his threatened leap across the table.

"I don't mean—" he began.

And then, from the doorway behind him, came an interruption which snatched attention from the grim scene at the faro table.

"Who's shoutin' my name?" roared a bull voice from the doorway.

And the next instant, a revolver in each hand, his heavily handsome features contracted into a black scowl, Pug Lowe himself stepped into the room. For the fraction of a second, the eyes of the assemblage, darting past him into the moonlit street outside, caught the glint of rifle barrels and a glimpse of the men who bore them, as Lowe's followers tried to crowd into the narrow entrance after their leader.

Then, with the thunderous crash of three reports, both of Lowe's revolvers, and the gun in the hand of King James, spoke simultaneously. One of Lowe's bullets thudded into the top of the faro table, thrown over on its side by a sweep of King James' arm, the other, deflected upward by the impact of the gambler's bullet on Lowe's left-hand gun, smashed a hanging lamp.

For that fraction of a second, the young man with the red hair had stood as if paralyzed, almost in the line of fire, his face toward Lowe. Now, with a yell, he gathered his muscles for participation in the fight, and to the intense surprize of every man in the hall—particularly that of King James, whose revolver, peering over the edge of the overthrown table, had just come to rest with its foresight over Lowe's heart—it was toward the Vigilante that he advanced. While Lowe was yet wringing the wrist so badly jarred by King James' shot, the red-haired stranger crept forward slowly, a deadly menace in his deliberate, swaying step.

Not until Lowe looked up and with a gasp of alarm raised his remaining revolver to fire, did the young man spring. Then, with a leap like a bobcat's he was at grips with his enemy. The revolver went off with a roar choked by the two bodies between which it was pressed, and Two Toes Trotter's joy of the earlier evening was changed to wo as the random bullet furrowed his thigh. Then the revolver itself clattered to the floor, followed an instant later by the writhing bodies of the two men.

A shot crashed from behind the faro table, and one of Lowe's followers, a villainous-faced Mexican who had just forced his way through the door, howled and clutched his right wrist. As Pug Lowe, with the red haired youth's hands at his throat, gasped horribly and drummed on the floor with his heels, King James came from behind his barricade and stood over the fighters, a revolver in each hand, his arms folded, his eyes on the door.

"Fair play," he said mildly, watching the sudden shrinking back of the Vigilantes, who had been following the Mexican to the rescue of their chief.

He was badly in need of rescue. Already, though it was scarcely a full minute since he and his adversary had jarred the crazy floor with their fall, his face was masked past recognition by the blood which poured over it.

By a desperate effort he gained a momentary advantage, staggered to his feet, and with a snarl of rage kicked at his adversary's head. A lean hand, shooting up, caught his ankle, twisting it so cruelly in an instant that even the spectators winced in

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sympathy, and the next second Pug Lowe, falling with his full weight on his face, was floored again, his jaw within reach of an iron-hard fist which swept in a lightning arc toward it. There was a dead, conclusive thud; and Pug Lowe, lying spread-eagled, gave a convulsive shudder through all his limbs and lay still.

"Let's chase 'em out of town!" howled Pie-Face Lammermoor, irritated to fighting point by his losses of the evening, and inspired to take the initiative by the example of the young man who was struggling to rise from the floor.

There was a yell of acclamation, a trample of feet as the room full of hard-bitten men swept toward the doorway, and, from outside, a scuffle of hoofs as the Vigilantes prepared for departure. The prospect of a man-hunt can clear a crowded hall quicker than all the fire-notices that ever were conceived. It was in far less than the statutory three minutes that King James, the red-haired youth, and Juggernaut Carr, found themselves alone with the prostrate body of Pug Lowe, listening to the rapidly receding sound of the chase through the night.

"I guess," said the red-haired young man, wiping a mangled mouth and tenderly feeling his nose, "that this should teach him several things."

"Such as—?" asked King James.

The eyes of the young man met the gambler's and held them.

"You said," he remarked slowly, "that you'd beaten him up last night. What for?"

King James drew a deep breath.

"Same thing as you beat me up for," he said. "Only he deserved it. Guess you won't believe me, but—I didn't."

Still the red-haired man's eyes searched the gambler's.

"Yeah, I do," he said. "An' I'm sorry. My name's Peter Noonan; called Pete." He wiped his mouth again. "If I'd ha' known he'd been hangin' around *her*, I'd ha' killed him."

King James stood perfectly still.

"This, then," he said, in his old, silky, slightly amused tone, "wasn't a love-crime? The gentleman on the floor had done something else to—er—annoy you?"

Peter Noonan blushed hotly.

"No love in it at all," he said; "dunno what you mean . . . . He came over to my place this morning, an' told me to get off the land—said it belonged to Miss Ransome. I chased him off, an' while I was away in Longhorn City this afternoon, he come back with his Vigilantes an' set fire to the shack. So I figured to get him."

"Just as he was figuring to get me," said King James reflectively. "Well, well, such is life. I didn't know you as one of the landowners around here, Mr. Noonan."

"Known as Pete," muttered the red-haired youth. "I ain't. I'm just lookin' after some land for a friend of mine that wanted to go prospectin' in Arizona. I owed him kind of a debt of gratitude, an' I'd just lost my job over to Corpus Christi, so I said I'd take care of the place for him till he came back."

"Arizona? Are *you* the boy Bill Simmonds hired?"

"Yeah."

"Oh!"

King James pursed his lips, and surveyed his *vis-à-vis* with interest.

"There won't be any court ruling about that land for some time," he said slowly. "And in the mean time, Miss Ransome, of the Stony Springs outfit, has been led by her adviser to consider it part of her land. This gentleman on the floor is her adviser. And her foreman. And some people think he's the chief of the Vigilantes."

Peter Noonan's jaw set.

"Admitting that you'll be delighted to fight this secret organization of the worst ruffians in Texas," said King James gently. "Are you—er—so keen on fighting Miss Lucy Ransome? Because that's what it amounts to."

For an instant, the red-haired young man seemed to hesitate, then with a glance at Juggernaut Carr, he burst forth defiantly—

"Listen; every one of us is liable to make mistakes, however good we are, an' the only way we can get cured of our mistakes is to have somebody fight us about them."

He checked himself suddenly as Juggernaut's brooding eye fixed on him with an expression of hopeless puzzlement.

"I guess it's my business, though," said Peter Noonan, turning toward the door.

'But the idea," said King James slowly. "By the way, Juggernaut here is discreet—the idea is that, supposing a certain person to be afflicted with an overweening pride, a contempt for humanity, and so on—it might do her good not to have her own way for once."

Peter Noonan wiped his mouth again.

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"I don't know that we need to discuss any ladies," he said. "But the general idea is that Bill Simmonds told me to keep his land for him until he got back, an' I'm goin' to do it. That's all!"

King James, standing with his eyes fixed on the young man's face, nodded approvingly; yet, somehow, he did not seem to have heard this last speech at all. Juggernaut Carr, watching his boss with the intensity of devotion, had an idea that it was to the suggestion he himself had made that the gambler was alluding when he spoke again.

"Yes," said King James. "I think that's a very good idea."

He slipped his revolvers back into their holsters and took Peter Noonan by the arm.

"If you'll come with me," he said, smiling, "I can fix up some of those dents for you—and anyhow, I'd like to talk."

"It seems to me," added King James reflectively, "that we might join forces."

IT WAS not customary for the mistress of Stony Springs to sit up late, nor was the girl used to being addressed by such men as she summoned to her presence, as if she were merely a human being. With the exception of Pug Lowe, whose entire lack of reverence and abounding egotism armored him against social awe better than ten thousand books of etiquette—the men who entered that library were accustomed to stand before the girl as if confronted with a minor goddess.

Habitually, she sat in the high backed chair of black leather which she now occupied, directly in front of the oil-painting of her mother which hung over the broad mantel. The similarity between the living face and the pictured was striking. Each, from its dark background, looked out with a beauty whose chief characteristic—and whose only marring quality—was the intense haughtiness for which Mrs. Ransome had been noted in democratic Three Pines Valley. Before her and before the daughter who had absorbed these aristocratic teachings so well, Three Pines Valley twiddled its Stetson and collectively suffered from prickly heat—except, hitherto, Pug Lowe only.

But now while ten miles away Pug Lowe was groaningly staggering to his feet, cursing through splintered teeth at the returning cow-punchers, who mocked him, another was refusing to bow before the altar; nay, more, appearing ignorant that there was any altar to bow to. Old Bill Garfield in fact, was sitting with his peg-leg cocked across his good knee, his hat hung on his timber toe, his arms folded, his aged eyes twinkling, just as he might have sat talking to any twenty-year old girl in his combined International Emporium & Sheriff's Office. Moreover, he was scratching his sparse gray whiskers, and sending therefrom clouds of alkali dust, as if he were in the presence of some one whose low connections would have taught her to make allowances for the griminess of busy men in wild places.

"I don't see exactly," said Mr. Garfield, "what you expect me to do."

"Didn't you get my message?" demanded Lucy Ransome.

Mr. Garfield shook his head.

"I've been out all day—over to Longhorn City," he said gently, "an' I came over to see you on business of my own. But——"

Any other man, woman, or child within a radius of twenty miles, hearing that Old Bill Garfield had business of his own, would have dropped all other concerns to learn if he needed assistance. Lucy Ransome ignored the fact altogether.

"I wanted to ask you," she said distantly, "how much longer you intend to let that old squatter and his blackguard young assistant try to blackmail me, after stealing half my water rights."

Mr. Garfield ceased his meditative scratching and considered the girl with a slightly awakened interest. After a moment he leaned forward to the edge of the black-oak table, rested both his elbows thereon and candidly stared into her face.

"Why, missy—" he began, as if surprized.

His tone of remonstrance brought not the slightest change, however, in the expression of the big black eyes which were fixed upon him so imperiously; or in the shape of the fresh young mouth whose disdainful curve nevertheless seemed to the old man to be rather uncertain—as if it had been taught, rather than acquired in the course of nature and as if the lesson had not yet been perfectly learned.

"I don't seem," said Old Bill Garfield, "to quite get you, my dear. First of all, Bill Simmonds ain't a squatter, but an old friend of mine; and secondly, supposin' he was, I don't quite see how you get around to callin' his young friend a blackguard, when it ain't a week since he saved your life."

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The girl blushed hotly.

"I thought it was strange when he wouldn't take the hundred dollars I offered him," she said. "He's been taking his pay by boasting, I suppose."

Mr. Garfield shook his head almost imperceptibly and slightly opened his venerable mouth. The Ransomes, first mother and daughter, had queened it over Stony Springs for eight years, but this was his first conversational meeting with either. And the shake of his head did not mean so much disapproval as intense amazement.

"My dear," he said, "I don't know where you get ideas like that from. You don't want to think that kind of thing about the folks around here. It ain't nice an' it'll make you unhappy. You shouldn't have offered a man that saved your life a hundred dollars; an' as for boastin'—why, I happened to see the whole business myself. I was down in Dead Man's Gulch when you so foolishly tried your stunt of gallopin' over the edge, an' I may say that I spurred Tony to the place where you'd have fallen, so you'd have me an' him to break your drop. But for this young blackguard's snatchin' you back with one arm when you were already off terra cotta, I suppose you'd ha' bin offerin' me money, too. As it was, your hawse nearly fell on me."

"All of which," said the girl, her cheeks still burning, but her manner perfectly collected, "has nothing to do with the water-rights."

"Got more to do with 'em," said Mr. Garfield gently, "than I have, until the court says who they belong to an' gives me instructions who to turn off, an' who to keep on."

"Do you mean to tell me," cried the girl, "that I've got to have my property cut in two for an indefinite length of time and be forced to keep on driving my Bar T stock a mile to water, until that court's unwound all its red tape? That land lies right between the two ranches. It was vacant, and its water-rights free until my mother died a year ago and I bought the Bar T. Then that old squatter came and built his hut on it, and threatened our men with a shot-gun. He won't sell. He won't rent. What is that but blackmail?"

Mr. Garfield's mouth opened a trifle wider.

"Since you say he won't take money, it might be quite a lot of things," he said. "For instance, it might be Heaven showin' disapproval of the way you picked up that ranch dirt cheap because poor old Tompkins needed the money so bad. Say, do you imagine, in this enlightened State, that old Bill Simmonds just walked on to that land and plain sat down on it?"

"I am not in the habit," said Lucy Ransome, "of paying attention to what other people think are the rights and wrongs of cases. That land should be mine."

"But the trouble is, my dear," said Mr. Garfield, patiently, "that it ain't. Nor it ain't Old Bill Simmonds', nor Bill ain't ever pretended that it was."

"Then whose is it?" demanded the girl.

"Why," said Mr. Garfield, combing his whiskers reflectively, "it's your father's."

Lucy Ransome rose suddenly from her chair, and her lips narrowed to a line.

"What do you mean?"

Mr. Garfield put a hand to his brow.

"Why, missy," he said in a worried voice, "I'm almost gettin' so I don't know myself. I didn't come over here to discuss this here business. I've got troubles of my own. Speakin' of Bill Simmonds reminds me of 'em. Now, I've got to ask you——"

"How can my father own this land?" the girl demanded again. "He is dead. He has been dead ten years."

The old sheriff shook his head resignedly.

"Presumed dead," he told her. "That is to say—not even presumed dead. Say, don't you know anything about your own dad, my dear?"

The girl hesitated, biting her lip. Obviously she was impelled to disclaim all such knowledge and refuse information; equally obviously, she wanted to know how the father she could not remember and of whom her mother had never spoken, could reach forth from his assumed grave and interfere with her imperial business.

"Before I give this here lecture," said Mr. Garfield resignedly, "would you please mind tellin' me one thing? Is your foreman to home this evening?"

"He—I don't know—yes, he went over to Gold Creek."

Mr. Garfield examined his watch.

"That means he won't be back till midnight," he sighed, "an' it's only eleven now. Won't you sit down?"

The girl had been preparing to re-occupy her chair; but this semblance of an order outraged her sense of the fitness of things.

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"I prefer to stand," she said, leaning against the mantel, her face so close to that in the picture that the likeness between the two was more noticeable than ever. Yet Old Bill Garfield, with seventy-two years of experience behind him, detected one vital difference. The look of hauteur, of scorn for humanity which was an integral part of the expression on the painted face, lay upon the features of Lucy Ransome like a translucent mask, which hid with only partial success the girl's own natural character. The old man nodded—again almost imperceptibly. It was a way he had when he made private notes concerning people.

"Well," said Mr. Garfield, "as you'd have found out, my dear, if you hadn't been too proud to take any notice of your own legal proceedings, your father's father owned both that piece of land and this present Stony Springs ranch. When he died an' left it to your father, your dad was up in Arizona—been there since before I lived around here—an' just about to marry your mother. Well, he gave her Stony Springs ranch for a weddin' present, but I guess he forgot about the other chunk of land, an' it remained his property.

"You see, your ma owned a big place in Arizona an' they stayed there. Next thing, as I make it out, your pa and ma found they couldn't get on together an' so your pa got out. Guess the Arizona place didn't pay without a man to look after it, so finally your ma come an' lived on the Stony Springs ranch. An' Pug Lowe showed her how to run a ranch, an' she succeeded so well that—that when she—er—passed on, you could buy the Bar T. Well, then you start usin' this strip of land; and then up comes old Bill Simmonds, like you say, an' chases your men off.

"Your elegant foreman, Mr. Lowe, who was a leetle afraid of Bill, asked me to come an' reason with him; which I done, figuring Bill must be crazed with the heat. Upon which the thing happened which has started all this legal trouble a-goin'. For Bill showed a written authorization to keep the land vacant. An' it was signed by your father!"

The girl started violently.

"A forgery!" she said scornfully.

Mr. Garfield shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe," he said, "but that's just what they're tryin' to prove in the courts. The signature tallies with other samples of your dad's writin', but on the other hand, the man himself won't come forward, though he's been advertised for. An' Ol' Bill Simmonds won't tell where he is. Just the other day, the courts sent to arrest him an' make him tell—which is why Bill was goin' to hop it out of the state."

At these last words, a look of sadness clouded the old sheriff's face.

"Poor old Bill!" he sighed.

Lucy Ransome was standing over the table, her hands clenched.

"Then you mean," she cried, "that my father is alive, and somewhere near; and that he and this old squatter, and this other man are in league against me—trying to interfere with my business?"

Mr. Garfield looked up shrewdly.

"It may be," he said slowly, "for your own good, my dear."

With a gesture of impatience, the girl turned away. Quickly, angrily, she turned back again.

"How is it that no one else knows anything of this?" she asked. "How do you come into possession of all this intimate knowledge, when not even my foreman knows anything about it?"

"Why," said Mr. Garfield, "you know, I'm sheriff around here. It's my official business. Old Bill Simmonds had to tell me to prevent me turning him off that land nine months ago. The facts ain't supposed to be known to anybody but the principals, which is why I didn't tell Lowe. I wrote you a letter statin' my reasons for failing to act and I figured you'd got it, since you started this law suit. Guess you didn't take notice of such a trifle, tho'. What did you do anyway—just call up a lawyer an' tell him to see what was the matter?"

Lucy Ransome had sunk into her chair again. Now, leaning forward with her small white chin in her hands, she was staring into vacancy with an expression Old Bill Garfield did not like. Pride, like that opposite state of mind known as love, is harmless enough when left alone; but pride injured, like love scorned, becomes a terrible force for evil. Before the sheriff's very eyes the expression of Lucy Ransome's face was changing.

"So that's it," came the girl's voice, very slow and soft.

Mr. Garfield reached across the table and with the perfect *sang-froid* of a deaf man stepping on a rattlesnake; of a

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color-blind weakling wearing orange on St. Patrick's Day; or of a very old man advising a very young girl—took Lucy's wrists in his hands.

"My dear," he said, giving the Queen of Three Pines an admonitory shake. "Listen to me, an' don't start any of this foolishness. You don't know me, but I know you an' I knew your mother before you, an' I've got one thing to say to you which I'm goin' to hold your hands until I've said, so you needn't storm at me. Whatever you've been told, whatever you've been led to think, you're nothin' but a human bein', walking about the earth like the rest of us; no different from any rough cowpuncher in this valley—except that the puncher's prob'ly firmer on his feet.

"I don't usually speak rough to young ladies, but it looks to me as if somebody's been tellin' you you could fly, an' look down on the world, includin' the Golden Rule and the United States Court. Well, you can't, an' what's more, I can see by your face that the real you don't want to. An' if you try it, you're sooner or later goin' to come down with an everlastin' bump. That'd dispel your illusions, but it'd hurt. I don't want you to be hurt."

White with fury, the girl tore her wrists from the old man's grasp and stood facing him, panting, like an insulted empress. Her hand trembled over a little silver bell.

"How dare you!" she gasped. "I'll have my servants——"

Mr. Garfield, rising, shook his head sadly.

"There you go," he said. "Sure of your power, sure nothing could interfere with your wishes. My dear, I am an old man, an' nothing much, to your way of thinking. But I assure you that if you called your servants, not one of them would dare to lay so much as a finger on me. Call 'em, if you like. If you're bound to fly, the sooner the bump comes the better."

Lucy's hand went away from the bell.

"And I suppose," she said, "that the same applies to my water-rights, and to my —my—alleged father's property. I am not to dare to touch that?"

Mr. Garfield stood silent.

"Then I tell you," said Lucy Ransome, "that I will have it and that I won't wait for the courts to cease their farce either. If the forces of the law will not help me to what is mine, I will take it in my own right and see if the law will prevent me!"

A horse, furiously ridden, came to a halt outside and heavy bootheels thudded on the boards of the veranda. Mr. Garfield's eyes narrowed and he turned slightly to look at the library door on which, at this moment, fell a heavy double knock.

"You mean," said the old sheriff, as the girl called "Come!" "that you'll make use of the—what they call the Vigilantes?"

The library door opened upon the gory and dishevelled spectacle of Pug Lowe. For an instant he paused, his eyes fixed on Bill Garfield, then, his torn jacket flapping, his bloodstained brows drawn into a heavy scowl, his torn under-lip and his bruised jaw thrust out under his heavy moustache in an expression of threatening ferocity, the big man stalked to the center of the room. Out of the tail of his eye, Old Bill Garfield saw the sensitive mouth of Lucy Ransome, freed momentarily from its artificial expression of pride, tremble at the grim spectacle before her. Then—

"Yes," she said, in a voice that trembled only slightly, "since the Vigilantes exist to make good the deficiencies of the law, I shall employ the Vigilantes."

Mr. Garfield nodded, in his almost invisible way. His eyes were fixed on Pug Lowe's waistline, as if noting with care that no revolvers hung in the ammunition belt.

"Haven't by any chance been employin' the Vigilantes already, have ye?" he asked.

A strange glitter leaped into Pug Lowe's eyes. Mr. Garfield absently dropped one shriveled old hand to the butt of a revolver.

"What do you mean?" the girl demanded.

"You, Lowe!" snapped the old man, in a tone very different from any the girl had heard him use so far. "I'm goin' to ask you a question, an' you better be careful how you answer it. Where were you last night at nine o'clock?"

"Out ridin' with Miss Ransome," said the tattered ruffian with a sneer.

"Was he?" asked Mr. Garfield.

"Yes."

"Any other witnesses?"

"King James, curse his soul," snarled Pug Lowe.

Almost simultaneously, Lucy Ransome broke furiously into the conversation.

"You dare to doubt my word!" she cried.

Mr. Garfield turned judicially on his heel and regarded her.

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"What do you mean?" the girl demanded tensely. "You come here—you insult me, you lecture me like a child—you question me——"

"The law," said the old sheriff quietly, "has considerable powers, miss, an' like love an' death it don't take much account of how important people think they are."

The girl stared from the sheriff to her foreman.

"So it is the law, is it," she asked disdainfully, "which causes you to come here and——"

"You see," said Mr. Garfield, "it's like this. You covet a piece of land which you think belongs to old Bill Simmonds. You threaten to employ the Vigilantes. Your own foreman is suspected of bein' the chief of the Vigilantes——"

"Prove it!" snarled Pug Lowe through his smashed teeth.

Mr. Garfield surveyed him musingly.

"Well?" snapped Lucy Ransome.

"Well," said Mr. Garfield, "Bill Simmonds was shot to death last night on the platform of Laredo station by a masked man who might ha' been a Vigilante."

The girl's eyes widened with horror.

Mr. Garfield, his peg leg thudding measuredly on the heavy carpet, went to the door. There he turned and looked back at the girl and at the man who stood, sullen and dangerous, in the middle of the room.

"I'm goin' over to Gold Creek to see King James about that alibi," he said slowly. "An' there's one thing I want to say in the mean time. The Mexican line's only five miles from here, but— You, Lowe! Look at me!"

The words, snapped like a whip, brought the eyes of the ruffian to the old man's face.

"But—" said Old Bill Garfield in a tone like silk, "don't you try to cross it!"

IT WAS three o'clock in the morning before an extremely weary version of the sheriff returned to his International Emporium, across which, feet on the counter, body bridging two chairs, head against the stove, sprawled the long and somnolent form of his office-deputy, Jake Henson, who on the old gentleman's entry opened one eye and inquired—

"Huh?"

Mr. Garfield seated himself on the counter.

"——'s a-goin' to pop," he said briefly.

Jake's feet hit the floor with a crash. With one motion of his long right arm, it seemed, he wiped the sleep from his eyes, found his hat and felt that both guns were all right.

"Calm yourself—calm yourself," said Mr. Garfield. "It ain't so immediate. Nor it ain't in the direction you think. So far as catchin' old Simmonds' murderer goes, we're as we were."

"Well, then——?"

"Say," asked the old sheriff, "do you know King James, over to Gold Creek?"

Jake nodded.

"Well, keep your eye on him an' also on a young red-haired friend of his that looks like a fightin' rooster, an' on Juggernaut Carr. Say, did you ever know King James was acquainted with Simmonds?"

Jake shook his head.

"It seems this young bantam's deputizin' for Simmonds," said Mr. Garfield. "So naturally I expected him to make a fuss when he heard of him bein' killed. But, comparatively speakin', he said nothin'. But King James, Jake, got right up from his faro table when I told him, an' if you'll believe me, he went as white as death. Sort of got all of a tremble all over. He drew a sort of whistlin' breath between his teeth, Jake, an' then he hopped up on what used to be the bar, an' addressed the gatherin'. 'Boys,' he says, 'this evening you saw this boy with the red hair hammer tar out of one Pug Lowe, following which you chased his friends the Vigilantes so-called a couple of miles.

" 'Now some of this abominable gang have committed cold-blooded murder. Speakin' personally, a hammering isn't a circumstance to what I'm going to hand out to that bunch henceforth, an' I'm going to tell you boys that if you're human beings, you'll be right with me—guns in one hand an' noosed ropes in the other.' "

"Speakin' of noosed ropes," said Jake Henson, "the Vigilantes hanged Tommy Brown over in Prairie Dog last week, for sayin' about half that much against them."

"Well," said Mr. Garfield stretching himself on the counter, "if they try to hang King James, ——'s goin' to pop, I tell you. If you'd heard them cowpunchers growl, an' seen the jaws on Juggernaut Carr an' that copper-knobbed bantam, you'd know it. An' if they don't hang King James, ——'s goin' to pop anyway."

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Jake Henson considered the prospect for a minute.

"Well, what's it all mean?" he asked finally.

"What's it all mean?" he howled, a second later, in a voice of thunder.

But Mr. Garfield, with the ease of old age and the soundness of a clear conscience, had gone to sleep.

It was at this moment that, in the tiny house of unpainted wood which backed up against the Temple of Chance, the red-headed youth and Juggernaut Carr, sitting on King James' little truckle bed were dividing their attention between the gambler's incomprehensible library and the spectacle of the grim man with the bandage, packing his grip. The library, parked on a small hanging shelf at the head of the bed, consisted of Montaigne in the Florian edition, cheek by jowl with the remarks of Bill Nye, flanked by a Bible, Epictetus, two volumes of Neil Lyons, Plutarch's Lives, two volumes of Kipling, one of Shakespeare, Emerson's Essays, and the poems of Francis Thompson.

"What you packin' your guns in the bag for?" demanded Juggernaut Carr uneasily.

"Because," said King James, "they won't let you wear 'em in Longhorn City."

"Going to Longhorn City?" inquired Peter Noonan.

"Just there."

The catch of the bag snapped to, and King James, rising, reached for his hat.

"I don't quite know how long I shall be gone—get my horse, Juggernaut," he said, in a slow, even voice which matched well with his still pale face. "But in the mean time, Pete, I guess I can leave things with you all right."

"If you mean about the land," said Peter Noonan. "I promised Bill Simmonds to look after it, an' I'm goin' to."

"How about it now he's dead?" asked King James.

"He didn't name anybody to give it up to in case he died," said Pete slowly. "So I guess all I can do is hang on to it, until somebody turns up with a right to it."

"Not going to give it up to Lucy Ransome, for instance?" asked the gambler quietly.

Pete blushed.

"No," he said. Then grimly, "And if any of them Vigilantes——"

"You'll have help against them if they start anything," said King James, putting his hands on the young man's shoulders. "How about the girl herself? You'll be alone against her, you know. She might ask you pretty."

Pete's blush intensified.

"Reckon she'd have to ask," he mumbled.

"Really?"

The red-haired youth raised his eyes.

"Say," he remarked slowly, "I'm a man, ain't I?"

"That's just why I wondered if you'd be able to refuse a pretty woman," said King James meditatively.

"The guy that can't, when it's his business to, an' for her good as well," said Peter Noonan, "ain't more'n half a man. Is this business of yours in Longhorn City anythin' to do with all this mess?"

King James, his eyes on the young man's face, nodded gravely.

"Quite a lot to do with it, in a way," he said. "In a kind of roundabout way, I guess it has more to do with your life than you have any idea of. But——"

Juggernaut entered again.

"The carriage waits, m'lord," he said diffidently. "If I'm goin' to stay with this young feller-me-lad out at the lot tonight, seems to me we might all ride together as far as Three Pines."

"Scared, Juggernaut?" asked King James, picking up his grip.

"No. Fond of you," growled the big man.

The question was intended as a joke, for throughout that whole section of a fearless country, Juggernaut Carr was renowned as the man most desperately willing not only to try anything once, but to keep on trying it after he had found it to be perilous. Even Old Bill Garfield, whose soubriquets were interchangeably "The Emperor" and "The Bearcat," took off his metaphorical hat to Juggernaut Carr; while Juggernaut Carr, since he had watched that fight between an unarmed man and an armed in the Temple of Chance, was inclined to tip his Stetson slightly in the general direction of Peter Noonan.

Nevertheless, when the mugginess of dawn broke over the strip of land between Stony Springs and the Bar T ranch, into the full light of a blazing day, both Juggernaut and Peter Noonan shivered down the entire length of their spines. All night long—campfireless so that possible snipers from

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the dark might have no aiming-point; lying under the stars in the absence of a hut, the two men had slept and watched by turns and had not been molested.

It was only when the day broke and Pete Noonan arose with coffee-pot in one hand and the biscuit-makings in the other that the two men perceived that the night had not been innocent. Fifty yards away from where they had lain, hanging by the neck from the limb of a china-tree, spinning and swaying in the light fragrant airs of the lovely morning, was the body of a man, a broad sheet of paper pinned to the breast of his khaki shirt.

At a run, their lips set, Juggernaut and Noonan approached the horrible figure.

"It's that puncher that shouted, 'To —— with them!' when King James was threatenin' the Vigilantes last night!" gasped Juggernaut suddenly.

A moment later they could make out the rude lettering on the paper. It read, sprawlingly—

Compliments of the Vigilantes

And underneath—

First Warning!

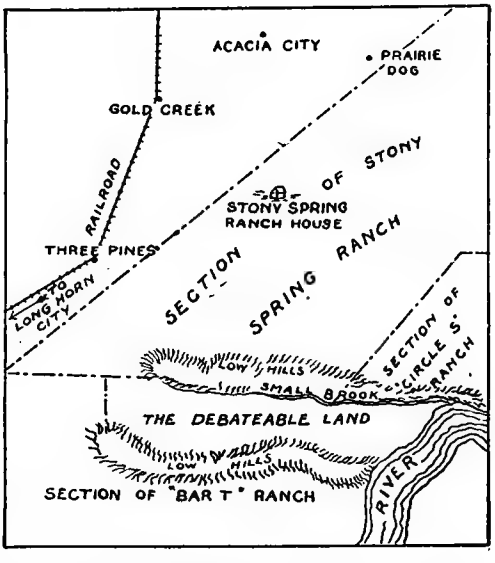
THEN for a week—such being the way of the puzzling phenomenon called life—everything seemed to go quietly. If hell was brewing—and Old Bill Garfield, searching in vain for a clue to the perpetrators of this second cowardly murder, was surer than ever that it was—the brew was simmering gently.

Cowpunchers from the Circle S on the west, to the Rising Sun five miles east, received the news of the murder with tightened lips, and faces that reddened dully over the cheek-bones; but they were busy men, unable to leave their work for man-hunts except in the most desperate circumstances, and, as they knew from experience, Vigilante-hunting was like chasing a shadow which, intangible in itself, could upon provocation disperse into absolute nothingness.

The man who slept next to one in the bunk house might, as the saying went, be carrying the rope in his hat. So that it was best to do even one's cursing while out line-riding.

Many a man, skirting the boundaries of the Ransome property, shook his fist at the home of the supposed head of the secret terror, and prayed profanely for proofs against him, and one clear swing at him and his confederates. But it was proof that was eternally lacking. On the day after the hanging of Arthur Hoyt, old Bill Garfield had had a second interview with Lucy Ransome. Obviously horrified, in spite of her forced pose of disdain, she had asked of what benefit the death of Hoyt could be to her.

As to the finding of the body on the debatable land now guarded perpetually by Peter Noonan, Juggernaut, and a mongrel




dog which had enlisted itself with them—she asked how long the putting up of scarecrows had been a criminal offense. Mr. Garfield, his eyes like diamonds, had retired without remarks. He did not know that the closing of the door behind him was the signal for a hysterical collapse on the part of the girl, followed by a stormy interview in which Pug Lowe, summoned to the library, denied all knowledge of the affair.

"If you want that land," Lowe had added, "you're liable to need rougher measures even than that, though, I'm tellin' you."

"Perhaps," the girl had flared. "But they'll be rough, and not cowardly. I'll have no move in this business made that I don't dictate myself. Do you understand that?"

Now, a week after the murder she was executing her first maneuver. Immediately after the receipt of a letter bearing the imprint of her lawyers in Longhorn City, she

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had called for her pony, summoned four stalwart punchers, who armed themselves, in addition to their revolvers, with rifles from the long rack of arms in the ranch-house hallway, and started out in the orange glow of the westering sun toward the strip of land between the Stony Springs and the Bar T.

Where, at the moment of her setting out, Juggernaut Carr and Peter Noonan were reading a letter which had come by the same mail, bore the same postmark and was addressed in the cramped, clear hand of King James.

"What's it say?" demanded Juggernaut, unsaddling his pony, which still sweated from its breakneck gallop back from Gold Creek.

Peter Noonan dropped the envelope on the back of the canary-colored dog, which sniffed it cautiously. He began:

"DEAR PETE: No clue yet to the killer of Simmonds——"

"Well, that's what he went for," said Juggernaut disconsolately.

"—but,"

the red-haired boy went on:

"I want to warn you, whatever you do, to stick to that land. Don't let anybody force their way on to it. The legal business down here has taken a sudden turn against Miss Ransome; the question of who's actually in possession of the land may be important. Possession is nine points of the law. Look out for a lawyer named Ragsdon. But above all, don't let anybody set foot on the land. I'll be with you soon.—JAMES MANN."

"Ragsdon!" cried Juggernaut. "Lawyer!"

Pete Noonan looked a question.

"Unless I'm a whole lot mistaken," said Juggernaut, "the gent's here already. A jasper in city clothes got off the mail-train at Three Pines, an' asked if there was any conveyance for him. He didn't mention his name, an' he didn't say where he was goin'. He hired Jimmy Coot's buck board an' drove off in the direction of Stony Springs!"

"Well, if he's a lawyer—" began Pete.

"Don't kid yourself into thinkin' that means we'll have a nice peaceable legal time of it," said Juggernaut. "There's more tricks in the law than sayin', 'May it please your washup.' I wish I was outa this!"

"Well, you can go," said Peter Noonan.

"Shut your fool head," said Juggernaut Carr.

Broodingly, he surveyed the skyline. Suddenly his eyes fixed on a moving dot on one of the bare hillsides which encircled the contested territory.

"Hello," he said softly. "Is somethin' startin' already?"

Pete stared, then reached for his saddle.

"Visitors," he said. "Get your hawse, Juggernaut. We'll meet 'em half way."

And five minutes later, the mongrel dog trotting through the dust at the heels of the ponies, the two men were on their way to speak with their enemies in the gate.

It was just as they crossed the stream which marked their own boundary, that Juggernaut, peering through narrowed eyes across the heat-shimmering hundred yards which separated the cavalcades, saw who led the invading party; and quickly, he glanced aside at Pete's face. Quite evidently, the young man at his side had also penetrated the masculine disguise effected by Lucy Ransome's broad-brimmed hat, khaki shirt, and breeches-like skirt. Quite evidently, too, the discovery had caused an alteration in the speed of his heart-beat; for he had suddenly become rather pale, but equally, evidently, the young man's resolve to do his duty and stick to his trust, was unchanged by the discovery.

His lips were set into a firmer line, his lean jaw thrust a trifle further forward, and from under the bang of red hair which straggled under his hastily donned hat, his gray eyes stared ahead unsoftened.

"Look out!" said Juggernaut, through his teeth.

His own hand dropped to a revolver-butt, as he crouched in his saddle. In the hand of the man to the right of Lucy Ransome, gleamed blue metal. The girl snapped an order, and it disappeared.

"Rifles across their saddles," the big man muttered, as the two parties drew together, their horses dropping into a walk. "Shoot quick, if you're goin' to, Pete!"

Now, five yards apart, defenders and besiegers halted. The mongrel dog—affectionately known, on account of his coloring, as "Lemon Meringue"—ambled forward and sniffed the ankles of Lucy's horse. Then, as if suspicious of the intentions of a pony which would kick out sideways, he lolloped back and sat between Pete and Juggernaut, his tongue out, grinning amiably at creation in general.

"Good afternoon," said Pete, taking off his hat.

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Perhaps nothing had been further from the thoughts of Lucy Ransome than the exchange of formal greeting; but there was something compelling in the look of those gray eyes.

"Good afternoon," she said coldly.

Pete's hat remained resting on the horn of his saddle.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked in his soft voice.

"No," said the girl before him. "Why should I want to see you? You presume on an accidental meeting."

A wave of red rushed into the young man's cheeks, and a moment later Lucy Ransome's eyes dropped. She did not know why, and the involuntary action clashed with her pride. Was she to feel ashamed for rebuking this common fellow, just because he had pulled her off a horse—and because his eyes were so steady? She looked up again, defiantly.

"Well, miss," Pete was saying, still softly and courteously, "I didn't know what other purpose you could have in ridin' out to this tongue of land."

"This land belongs to me," said Lucy Ransome angrily, "and I've come out to claim it."

"Seems to me you're claimin' it in the courts," said Peter Noonan, glancing rapidly at the men on each side of Lucy. Imperceptibly, they were drawing up; and the tense, fixed look in their eyes told with what intention.

"Well," Lucy answered, "now I have come to take possession of it."

There was a dead silence.

"I'm afraid," said Peter Noonan, "that I'm here to prevent just that."

"Then—" the girl began.

Her hand, which had rested on the horn of her saddle, rose in a quick motion. But as if the signal had been to Juggernaut Carr, instead of to the men at her side, it was the big man to Peter's right who first sprang into action. Carr's spurs dug suddenly into his pony's flanks, and with a neigh of alarm which echoed Juggernaut's roar of rage, the animal leaped forward its own length; and then, as the bridle tugged at its mouth, reared on its hind legs, lashing out madly with its fore-hoofs.

"Come on!" shouted Juggernaut.

One of the lashing hoofs struck the forehead of an enemy pony, which reared so that his rider, devoting both hands to the levelling of a rifle, rolled from his saddle to the ground where he sprawled, arms raised to protect his head from the lashing hoofs of his mount. Juggernaut's revolver thundered, and the second man to Lucy Ransome's left dropped his rifle, swayed in his saddle and slumped forward over the horn. The horse, blowing furiously through its nostrils, stood a moment undecided, then turned and galloped away through a cloud of dust, its rider jouncing with sickening limpness across its neck.

It was at this moment—just as Juggernaut, hurling himself bodily from the saddle, dropped with his full weight on his first victim, who had now climbed to his feet—that Peter Noonan joined battle. Like Juggernaut, he charged on horseback, though, with less experience of rough-and-tumble fighting, he failed to make his horse rear and shield him with its body. A rifle-bullet hummed past his ear as his pony's shoulder cannoned into an enemy's, which fell, spilling its rider heavily.

The second adversary on Pete's side, abandoning rifle for revolver, suddenly went through the experience of seeing the afternoon landscape explode into a billion stars, revolving in the blackest space. Pete's fist had taken him under the ear, and he abandoned revolver for insensibility.

Then, with a less practised—or possibly more humane—descent from the saddle than Juggernaut had accomplished, Pete Noonan dismounted to grapple with his remaining adversary. There was a revolver in the man's hand; he was on his knees already. A kick sent the gun flying, and then Pete's hundred and fifty pounds of bone and muscle flattened the man out again.

The fight between Juggernaut and the Hercules he had overthrown was the more sensational; but Lucy Ransome, statue-like on her horse, stared as if hypnotized at the struggle on her left. Juggernaut, rolling upon his adversary as if to justify his nick-name, was bellowing like a bull.

Pete, his teeth clenched, blood already running down his face from a cut over one eye, fought in silence. He had his man's neck in his hands, and his knee was driven into a heaving chest; disregarding the sledge-hammer blows which rained on his face, he hung on until, exhausted, the man under his hands stopped struggling.

Then, as if unwilling to prolong the

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crushing pressure on the windpipe an instant more than was necessary, he rose. For an instant he stood swaying, his eyes meeting the horrified gaze of Lucy Ransome. Then a bellow for help from Juggernaut resounded. Instantly, the young man with the red hair was a fighter again. Juggernaut's hold had slipped. He was underneath and the man whose face he had pounded almost to a pulp, blind and mad with fury, had half-risen and drawn a revolver.

With a choked scream of terror Lucy Ransome saw her supporter bring the weapon's muzzle to within six inches of Juggernaut's face. The hammer rose slowly—her gaze was fascinated by its movement. Then, with a sharp noise like the coming-together of two blocks of hard wood, the head of the man with the revolver twisted to one side. All the force of Pete Noonan's lithe body had been behind the punch he had sped to the side of the jaw; and the last bravo from Stony Springs lay clucking and twitching on the ground.

Pete Noonan glanced at Juggernaut, who was already struggling to rise, and then with an uncertain smile at Lucy sat down suddenly on the ground.

"Too bad," he said dazedly. "Too bad. Sorry—happened before a lady."

It was as if he had uttered a magic word designed to recall to Lucy Ransome's mind all the tawdry teachings driven into her by the mother who had esteemed the memory of a British nobleman ancestor to be better than the happiness of a home. For the last three minutes the girl's soul had revolted at the pitiable scene brought about by her self-will—a self-will springing, moreover, from a pride which had no natural source in her own character. But as is the way of all flesh, this sign of indecision on the part of the man she knew to be in the right, weighed with her more than all her natural convictions. Blazing with outraged dignity, the mistress of Stony Springs swung from her saddle and stood over the sitting man.

"Stand up!" she said, through her teeth.

Rather unsteadily, Pete rose. His gray eyes met the girl's and for a moment, her resolution trembled. Then, instantly, came the reaction. How dare this nobody make her shrink from his direct regard? Her fingers tightened about the handle of the quirt she carried.

"You may dare to squat on my land, and assault my men when they come to reclaim it," she said tensely. "But don't imagine that you can—can lord it over me."

Pete said nothing; but suddenly, the girl realized that he had not attempted the action of which she accused him. He had, in fact, been most humble before her. The idea of his supremacy over her came from within herself!

As if in panic, she went on—

"When common hoboes cross my path, I——"

She half-raised the riding whip. Pete stood perfectly still, his eyes on her. In another instant, she knew, some impalpable power would prevent her from asserting her descent from the nobleman whose name she forgot.

Desperately, with the full force of her arm, she slashed the quirt across Peter Noonan's bloodstained face, and saw a long red weal spring out from eye to lip.

"That'll teach you—you'll see—" she gasped, half-unconscious of what she was saying.

Against her will, her eyes had filled with tears. Why didn't he cry out or put his hand to the cut? It must burn——

With a low growl, the mongrel dog crept forward from his master's side toward her, his spine-hairs bristling. Frenziedly striving to fight off the overwhelming sense of weakness and remorse which was driving her toward the brink of a weeping breakdown and everlasting shame before these common men, the girl slashed her quirt at the dog.

And then Peter Noonan moved.

The girl felt her descending wrist caught in a grip of steel, and looking up, found the gray eyes under the shock of red hair fixed on her face with an expression as angry as the red weal which stared at her from Peter Noonan's cheek. The quirt dropped from her hand; but the grip which was bruising her wrist did not loosen.

"Lash me all you like," said a curiously smooth, hard voice, "but don't touch my dog. If you was a man I'd have beaten you for that; if you was a lady, you wouldn't ha' done it. Get on your horse and ride home."

Her pony was at her side. Pete's right hand reached for its bridle, and pulled the animal forward. His grip on the girl's wrist shifted to her elbow. He was helping her to mount. Trembling violently, her mind in a strange state of stupefaction, she put foot

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in stirrup and got to the saddle. As if drawn by some outside power her big black eyes fixed again on Pete's. Though Lucy did not know it, her look supplicated for forgiveness; but the gray eyes which gazed back at her did not soften.

"Good evenin'," said the man with the slashed cheek, stepping back to the side of Juggernaut Carr.

By a mighty effort, Lucy Ransome restrained herself until her pony, hard spurred, had carried her to a distance whence the sobs which shook her, and the convulsive heaving of her slim shoulders with their force, could not be perceptible to the men she had left; but all the way home, she abandoned herself to a passion of inexplicable emotion. For the first time in her life, her self-will had met with a definite defeat; the idea of her own superiority to humanity in general flatly contradicted. For the moment, the laboriously built edifice of pride was overthrown, and could Pete Noonan, or old Bill Garfield, or the quiet-voiced gambler, who was about his business in Longhorn City, have spoken to her then, it might never have risen again.

But she was alone in the purple dusk of the prairie. And in the library of the home toward which she was riding sat only a fat, pasty-faced man who continually rubbed his hands together.

A lawyer.

Named Ragsdon.

THE course of life is controlled by trifles, and in this case, the course of events was determined by woman's ages-old disinclination to exhibit tear-stains to any one outside her immediate family. Shaken as she was, Lucy's first impulse, when a Chinese servant told her that a gentleman awaited her, was to hurry, not to the library, but to her own room; where she occupied ten minutes with cold water, hairpins, and eau de cologne.

It was during this ten minutes that Mr. Ragsdon, chewing his third unlighted cigar in a corner and wishing somebody would light a lamp, was startled by the sudden, almost violent, entrance of a big man who had just ridden up to the ranch-house at breakneck speed. An alarming fellow, with a bull-voice and a blackguardly manner of addressing Chinese, but welcome to Mr. Ragsdon nevertheless. Mr. Ragsdon did not like to sit alone in even semi-darkness. He had had a long and peculiar professional career, and the dusk was liable to bring into his mind faces and incidents he would have preferred to forget.

"Where's this gellamun you say's waitin'?" demanded Pug Lowe, stumbling over a table. "Condemn you, you yellow ——, show a light, will ya? Where's Miss Lucy? Eh?"

The Chinaman struck a match and with trembling fingers lifted the chimney of the table lamp.

"Missa Lucy upstahs, Missa Lowe," he stammered. "I go fetch!"

He ducked and scuttled from the room as Lowe raised a threatening fist over him. The foreman, replacing the lamp-chimney as the wick flared up, took the lamp by its base, raised it above his head and with the yellow light from above intensifying the look of sullen anger which still further brutalized his animal face, stared loweringly into the lawyer's face.

"You the attorney that's managin' this land business?" he growled.

Internally, Mr. Ragsdon was trembling most unpleasantly; but part of his forensic training—a very important part—had taught him how to deal with men who made him tremble.

"Are you," he asked, "the gentleman known as Pug Lowe?"

"Yes," snarled the foreman. "What of it?"

"Only this," said Mr. Ragsdon, shooting out a finger. "Be very careful, my friend! I'm not here as a friend of lawbreakers, but this I will say. There is a man in Longhorn City who is looking for the killer of William Simmonds."

"Why, you——"

"I don't say you are the guilty party," said Ragsdon ceremonially. "I merely say that James Mann, alias King James, is inquiring as to the several dates of your presence in the city. Murder is no business of mine."

Lowe set down the lamp with a crash.

"You snake," he demanded, "who was it told Pinky Wallace that things might be simpler if Simmonds was dead?"

The lawyer gasped and retreated a step.

"In the natural course of nature," he stammered, "Mr. Simmonds was an old man, and——"

Lowe's hairy hands grasped his wrist, driving five dollars' worth of gold cuff-link painfully into the flesh.

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"Don't you try sidesteppin' with me," he snarled. "I ain't met you before, an' I don't wanna meet you again, but don't you imagine you can fool me, you underdone apple-pie, yuh! I know who my orders come from, even if they was only hints, an' now I'm face to face with yuh, I want to know somethin' else. I ain't gonna work in the dark no longer. I ain't playin' this game outa loyalty to the old farm, any more'n you are. I got personal reasons for wantin' this ranch to have water-rights an' all complete. I've understood that Simmonds was all that stood between us an' that strip of land. Well, he's dead, an' yet you lawyers keep on talkin' about gainin' an entrance to the land, an' hopin' for a favorable decision, an' so on."

"Professional etiquette—my client—" gasped Ragsdon, in a cold perspiration of fear.

"——!" roared Lowe, all restraint abandoned. "Your client! What's your client know? You send orders to her instead of me, an' she goes ridin' out like a fool an' gets four of my best men laid out on me! Now say, you come across. What's——"

"Did the attempt to gain entrance fail?" asked Ragsdon, tremblingly playing for time.

"Fail?" snarled Lowe. "Fail! Why——"

He stopped suddenly, for Lucy's footsteps had sounded on the uncarpeted oak of the staircase. But his eyes held Ragsdon's, and the lawyer's met his. And in a low voice the foreman clinched the mutual understanding which was signaled in the glance.

"We both got interests," he whispered thickly. "Don't you advise against 'em!"

A moment later Lucy entered, bowed to Ragsdon and then glanced sharply at Lowe.

"I was not aware," she said coldly, "that I had invited you to be present."

"I thought—" began the big man.

"Please go," the girl answered, seating herself in the chair in which she had received Bill Garfield.

Lowe glanced at Ragsdon—a meaning look. The lawyer licked his lips.

"I really think—" he began uncertainly.

"I bin tellin' this guy," said Lowe, in a voice from which he could not entirely banish the tremble of suppressed rage, "what a mess you made this afternoon, tryin' to run my end of the business."

Lucy Ransome rose.

"And what, pray, is your end of my business?"

"Force!" snapped Lowe, bringing his hand down on the table. "When all the courts have pawed over your property an' said whose this is an' whose that is, or whatever they're figurin' to say, I'm the guy that 'll come along an' settle the matter the only way it can be settled. I'm the jasper that'll see that two plug-uglies an' a common gambler that's muckin' in on this business for some reason, don't laugh at you, Miss Ransome."

Unerringly, his speech touched the right note—and at the right time. Ten minutes before, the girl would not have cared for the prospect of Pete Noonan's laughter—she would have rejoiced in any change in the expression of those gray eyes which had stared at her so sternly. But now, standing before her mother's picture, it was different.

She looked at Ragsdon.

"What do you say?"

Again the lawyer licked his lips.

"The case—the case does not look promising," he mumbled. "The question of possession of the land is of great importance. If, as I understand, you made an armed attempt at entry this afternoon and were repulsed—that is a point against us. I—I should not advise you to discard any—any possible help."

Lucy sat. The lawyer sank into a chair. Only Lowe remained standing.

"What has turned the case against us so suddenly?" the girl asked.

"It's impossible to say," Ragsdon answered, shaking his head. "But—but there is something. The defense has been mysterious from the beginning. We don't know, now, where the money to pay their lawyers is coming from. We suspect it must be from your father, of course. But who is he, where is he, and what is his object in fighting a costly legal battle with you, his own daughter?"

"What—" began Lowe, startled at this—to him— novel aspect of the case.

"I asked you," Lucy cut in, "what you knew about this new development. There is no necessity to inform Mr. Lowe of the case's history."

"Quite so—er, no," Ragsdon stuttered. "Well, this is the point, Miss Ransome. Simmonds was killed, just before he should have appeared as a witness on subpena.

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On this account, the court adjourned the case. It will resume the day after tomorrow and we know, through the medium of certain—er—er——"

"Spies," snapped Lucy.

Ragsdon winced.

"Certain informants," he went on, "that it is the defense's intention to spring a surprize. What it is, we do not know. But we have one chance to discount it—the chance I mentioned in my letter today."

"What's that?" growled Lowe.

"To announce, when the court resumes, that we are in possession of the land."

"What'll that do?" growled Lowe again.

"We have been trying for a year to get a decision ejecting these people from the land," said Ragsdon. "If we are in possession before the decision is handed down, we can with a little skillful engineering, start the legal fight all over again and protract it indefinitely. Your father, Miss Ransome—supposing it is he who finances this battle—is probably not of extensive wealth. Provided we are in possession of the land by the day after tomorrow, we can starve him out."

There was an interval of dead silence.

"You think, then," said Lucy at last, "that the chances of a decision in our favor are slight?"

Ragsdon's reply was probably conscientious, but certainly he was impelled to put it more forcibly by the almost invisible nod of the head with which Pug Lowe instructed him.

"You, my dear lady," said the lawyer, "would not understand all the intricacies, and of course I do not know what the defense is preparing to spring. It may be the personal appearance of your father. I do not know. But whatever it is, from what I know, it is going to be a crusher, and our chance, as I say, lies entirely——"

Lucy nodded.

"In takin' these —— squatters—" roared Lowe, thumping the table again.

The girl's eyes fixed on him.

"Are you issuing orders to me?" she asked quietly.

The blackguard's impatience for his native element—blood, violence, revenge, and self-interest—had maddened him.

"I'm tellin' you what's got to be done, if you ain't goin' to be sneered at by everybody in Three Pines Valley!" he snarled. "You got to make up your mind to do somethin', and then hand things over to the guy that'll see it's done. I got an interest——"

As if realizing that he was about to blurt something better kept to himself, he stopped suddenly, and Lucy spoke.

"One word more to that effect, Lowe," she said slowly, "and your interest, whatever it is, will cease."

The big man stared at her.

"I will discharge you instantly," Lucy Ransome continued slowly. "Just as I would any other hand that forgot himself."

"I—" began Lowe.

"Leave the room!"

Mr. Ragsdon was a man; but, he reflected as the big man rose, he would not have dared do what this girl had done. Or having done it, he would have relented abjectly at first sight of the expression, accompanied by a dull red flush, which had flashed to Pug Lowe's face. This kid with the big black eyes and the proud mouth was some stepper, all right. If Mr. Ragsdon had been thirty years younger, and unmarried, and better looking, and of a courage sufficient to live with such a little spitfire, he might almost, he reflected, be attracted to her himself.

While Lowe shambled to the door the lawyer glanced up as he had done on a previous visit, from the daughter's face to the picture of the mother. It seemed to him now that the resemblance between the two faces was less marked than he had thought. He wondered how he had ever considered them particularly alike. The girl's face had a softness which——

He stared at the girl as she sat with her chin on her hands, deep in thought. He was sure the likeness had been stronger when he was there before and—and—why, as he looked, the resemblance was coming back. The expression of the eyes was hardening, the finely cut nostrils were dilating, the haughtily curved mouth, which for a little while had seemed to have a strange quality of sweetness, was setting more firmly.

"I don't think," came the girl's voice, "that you need worry, Mr. Ragsdon."

"Eh?"

"I say, you need not worry. You can prepare to proceed with the case on the assumption that we are in possession of the land—that we have gained entrance to it."

Ragsdon looked nervously about the room. The terrifying figure of Pug Lowe



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was in fact gone, nevertheless he lowered his voice.

"If possible—without violence," he suggested. "As a last resort perhaps, but—the courts are inclined to frown—you understand me. And moreover, I—I have had some experience with cases of this sort and I have found that—that it is not unusual for an attempt at force to be followed by serious trouble."

"You mean that I must not employ the Vigilantes?"

"As a last resort—but I cannot advise you. It would be entirely illegal and, as I say, I have known cases where there was a regrettable rising of the countryside against such measures. A leader is needed, of course, but— Well, there is a man in Longhorn City now who might—a man named King James, a gambler and, it seems to me, a man to be feared."

"What connection has he with this business?"

Ragsdon shook his head.

"I have not seen him," he said. "Nor have any of my agents; but he has been inquiring about the death of Simmonds—a bad sign, and——"

"Be quiet!" said the girl.

She had not the slightest connection with the murder of the old man, nor with the hanging of the bright-faced boy whose body had so grimly confronted Pete Noonan and Juggernaut on their beleaguered territory. Pug Lowe, her only possible link with these outrages, had stoutly denied any knowledge of them. Yet old Bill Garfield had hinted, and now this man——

"I think I can promise you the result—without violence," she said, with a slight smile.

"Then," said Mr. Ragsdon, reaching willingly for his hat, "I will return to town and see that we are all ready when court reconvenes. You will telephone when you gain possession?"

"Won't you stay tonight?" the girl asked perfunctorily, nodding.

"Thank you—thank you very much—no, no," said the lawyer. Perhaps a million dollars in gold, paid in advance, might have induced him to stay longer than was necessary near Pug Lowe, and in the midst of the deadly situation which his advice—to his own great profit—had fomented; but certainly no lesser sum.

His hired buckboard had left Stony Springs ranch-house two hours before Lucy Ransome went to bed. During this period, the girl spoke to no one; sat alone in the moonlight on the railing of the porch. She seemed to be going over, in her mind, the whole miserable business of the land between the Bar T and the Stony Springs—her own little Naboth's Vineyard.

And gradually, as she sat there, the hard look of perfectly egotistic resolve, of superiority to right and wrong which had animated her face when the lawyer left her—as it had, also, when she started her attempt, months before, to grab the land, changed until her eyes held the same strangely humble look which had filled them in the last few moments of her interview with Pete Noonan that afternoon.

She was thinking of that interview it seemed, for instinctively her own hand touched her face just where the lash of the whip had cut that red weal across Pete Noonan's, and a moment later the haughty mistress of Stony Springs had buried her face in her hands. This symbol of weakness lasted only a moment, yet the emotion which inspired it seemed hard to fight off. Her hands clenched, her head thrown back defiantly, a puzzled, almost frightened pucker between her brows, the girl paced agitatedly up and down the porch.

Hitherto she had done what she wanted, rejoicing. No scruples born of a consideration for the rest of the world's population had arisen to interfere with the accomplishment of her will. What was this strange emotion which seemed to be fighting within her against the excellant plan she had conceived for the attainment of her desire for the strip of land?

Suddenly re-entering the house, she went into the library and in the light of the lamp which had been left burning, gazed for a long time at the picture of her mother. Then, as if inspired with a new strength, she blew out the lamp and went upstairs.

She was in her room, looking questioningly at her reflection in the mirror, as if it had been that of a stranger of whom, against all her desires, she could not entirely approve—at the moment when, miles away, the conference which Pete Noonan and Juggernaut were holding in the tent they had rigged up out of old canvas and limbs of trees, was interrupted.

"And so all we can do—" Juggernaut was saying.

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The wall of the tent resounded as with the impact of a sharp blow, and the big fellow started violently. Both men glanced around the interior of the rude shelter. In the middle of one of the sloping sides, something gleamed—a rod of polished wood, tipped with metal.

"An arrow!" gasped Juggernaut.

He went outside, first extinguishing the dim lamp whose light, shining through the tent-door, might have betrayed him to a waiting sniper. In a moment he returned with the missile.

The lamp relighted, he examined it, then gave it to Pete. It was of a type common in Indian pueblos—pointed with a bit of brass tube, hammered together and filed to needle sharpness, and feathered with hen-feathers. Around it, near the point, was wrapped a piece of paper, tied with the coarse black thread cowboys carry in the saddlebags for the repair of clothing.

"It's a message," said Juggernaut hoarsely.

Pete's knife nicked the thread; the paper, unrolling itself, fell to the floor. Juggernaut picked it up. He was a slow reader, and Pete Noonan, swinging him around, read over his shoulder.

The message was brief and to the point. It read—

get off by tomorrow nite

And, in sprawling letters such as had graced the paper on the corpse's breast:

Compliments of the Vigilantes. Second warning.

WHATEVER else remained primitive and unchanged in Three Pines Valley, certainly times had altered for Old Bill. In his tempestuous youth, he had been a captain in the Texas Rangers, where a man's only valid license to act in the name of the law was a superior quickness with lethal weapons; and for some time after his comparatively recent settlement in Three Pines, he had been accustomed to run the office and business of sheriff entirely without warrants.

A man suspected was a man locked up until Mr. Garfield had come to a more definite conclusion as to his innocence or guilt. Nay, a rowdy character apparently in need of cooling off, was clapped in the cooler without reference to the benevolent Judge Mason at Acacia City. Now, however, Judge Mason was dead, and his place was filled by a stranger with whom, as Mr. Garfield explained to Juggernaut Carr when the latter routed him from bed at 6 A. M., the old methods were not in favor.

"Do you mean to say—?" Juggernaut demanded.

"I mean to say this," Mr. Garfield answered, climbing reflectively out of bed. "If it hadn't been for that Merriweather jasper—who really looks more like a wet week-end—Mister Pug Lowe an' quite some of his friends, includin' that Lucy Ransome, 'd have been where they couldn't do any harm, since quite some time back. An' they'd have stayed there until after the courts of Longhorn City had handed me the right to stop any fightin' there might be over this land, by force."

"Do you mean to say you can't do anythin'?" asked Juggernaut, starting for the door.

"I mean to say this: That I'm an old man, Juggernaut, an' not up to these here modern tricks of catchin' violent men with bits of blue paper. Also that I got a store here, an' several great-grandchildren dependin' on me; an' that this Judge Merriweather has told me that if I act without one of his warrants I'm liable to catch —— for false-imprisonin' somebody, an' have everything I own took from me. I may say that it was just after he told me that, an' told everybody in Texas that he'd told it to me, that the Vigilantes started up."

"You think he's workin' with this bunch?" demanded the big man, toying unpleasantly with his belt.

"I don't think anythin'," said the old sheriff, putting on his one boot and picking up his saddle. "All I know is that he's refused to issue warrants for the arrest of Pug Lowe on suspicion of complicity in the murder of Bill Simmonds and that guy they hanged from your China tree—said the evidence warn't sufficient—and that accordingly, Mr. Lowe is still abroad, stirring up trouble. Big trouble, too. You want to look out today, Juggernaut!"

"Where are you goin'?"

"I'm goin' over to Merriweather's," said Mr. Garfield, "to ask him which he'd rather—have Pug Lowe arrested for two days until the land case is decided, or have more bloodshed. For I'm goin' to tell you, Juggernaut, there's either goin' to be an arrest today, or bad trouble before tomorrow mornin'. You

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wanna get ready for it. Has that King James guy got back from Longhorn City?"

"Nuh!"

"Well, then, you take that copy of the *Longhorn City Lariat*, an' run your eye over what it says about that land case. I dunno how you gumps figure to get along without the news. That case is goin' to come up again forty-eight hours hence, an' the side that ain't in possession of the land then, is goin' to be the one that's outa luck. Get that? An' since Pug Lowe is goin' to be at large, you want to watch for squalls today—and particularly tonight. Get that? If you got any friends that can shoot, invite 'em to come an' visit you."

"How about yourself?" said the big man.

Mr. Garfield's face twisted as if in pain.

"Juggernaut," he said. "For the last two nights, I been lyin' awake, thinkin' what I'd give for a good crack at that low-browed skunk an' his corps of stabbers-in-the-back. There's only one thing I have to give, if I arrested him or shot him without a warrant, an' that's my store. An' that ain't mine—it belongs to my——"

"That's all right, Bill," said Juggernaut, vaguely.

He fidgetted with his neckcloth.

"Jug," said the old man. "I—I got a sort of presentiment. Things ain't right, around here. If you killed Lowe I might get forced to arrest you ——"

"After catchin' me," said Juggernaut grimly.

Mr. Garfield nodded dully.

"Guess I'm getting old," he whispered to himself. "Seems to me they got me kind of druv into a corner."

Suddenly his eyes flashed.

"But I'll do my best," he snapped. "G'-by!"

Five minutes later, he was galloping along the trail to Acacia, and Juggernaut, the Longhorn City paper tucked into the breast of his shirt, was making time back toward where Pete Noonan held the fort.

As he rode, the big man thought deeply. The sheriff was powerless to assist them and the half-hundred cowboys who had shouted their condemnation of the Vigilantes in the Temple of Chance when King James addressed them were scattered over an area of as many square miles. It meant a day of solid riding, if they were to be called in to help, and besides, though they had responded to the gambler's magnetic personality, would they take the actual plunge into peril at the behest of either himself or of the stranger—Pete Noonan? It wasn't as if this were a plain man-hut. The Vigilantes had terror on their side. They crept up on men in the dark, and hanged them from their own doorsills.

A light sweat broke out on Juggernaut's brow as he topped the last rise of land before the valley which he was simple-mindedly determined to defend to his last gasp. The little tent in its midst looked so frail and defenseless, but he rejoiced not to find it overthrown or burning. It had been a risk, his leaving Pete Noonan alone while he rode to Three Pines on the chance of aid. His slow mind realized that the risk of leaving one man, however pugnacious, to guard the valley for a whole day, was too great to be taken. Before the countryside could be roused to repel the Vigilantes, they would in all probability have swooped down and gained their objective.

Nothing to be done then, but sit in the tent and wait, and when the attack came, to keep on shooting as long as——

The big man gave a gasp of joy.

Two ponies instead of one stood behind the tent, and at this moment a familiar figure emerged from the shelter and climbed on to a familiar cream-pied back.

"King James!" cried Juggernaut, driving his spurs home. "Hi-i-i-i-i-yi, boss!"

He saw the mounted man look up, as also did Peter Noonan, who, standing in the doorway of the tent appeared to be receiving instructions. Then he saw King James wave an arm in greeting and start forward.

"He's come back just at the right moment," Juggernaut confided to his horse, as the distance between himself and his boss diminished rapidly. "The dog-gone card-sharpin' ruffian! Hi-yi, boss, how's everythin' in town?"

King James reined in. It seemed to Juggernaut that the brush of gray in the hair above his ears was a little larger than it had been a week before and that the corners of the firm mouth were set in a grimmer line. But the kindly gray eyes were as ever, and now they smiled on the big fighting man. Juggernaut flushed, shifted in his saddle and felt, somehow, that all this bellyache about this yer bit of land—which didn't seem to be any of his or his boss' business anyhow—was after all, supremely worth while.

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"Things in town," said King James slowly, "are pretty well all right, Juggernaut—provided all's well up here. But up here, things are trying to be exceedingly bad."

Juggernaut nodded his head gravely. Any other man who had told him that would have been received with biting sarcasm, but if the boss had seen fit to remark that one and one made two, Juggernaut would have received the information gravely. So, it may be mentioned, would most other men after a good look at their informant. King James was not the type of man at whom one laughs.

"I am going out on a little business connected with the situation," said the gambler. "You'll stay with Peter there, until I come back. If anybody attempts to cross the property line—shoot, unless you know him."

Juggernaut nodded.

"See you later," said King James, nodding as his pony moved forward.

It was almost on the moment, half an hour later—when the cream-pied pony was arriving in a cloud of dust at the Stony Springs ranch-house; and while Pete Noonan and Juggernaut, in their tent, were dividing their attention between their boundary line and the newspaper which expanded the news hastily given Pete by King James—that Old Bill Garfield, swinging disconsolately out of the trail from Acacia at the point where it joined the road from Stony Springs, came face to face with Lucy Ransome. She was riding, the old man's instinct informed him, to the land which she claimed as hers. At the corner where the trails joined, her pony was perhaps a yard from his.

"Wait a minute, Miss Ransome," said the old sheriff.

The girl gave no sign that she heard, save that her hand pulled slightly on the off rein. The next instant Garfield's pony, used through many years to skilful ranging alongside of other horses, had darted forward in a scuffle of dust and a thin old hand with a grip like steel, had closed on Lucy's arm.

"I said, 'Wait!' " came the voice of the old man sternly. "An' if I ain't got any powers as a sheriff any more, you can obey me as you would a grandfather. Now you listen to me."

It is doubtful whether, in the whole course of his long life Old Bill Garfield of the peg leg, the benevolent smile, and the scraggy gray whiskers, had ever issued a direct order to a woman. But now his old heart seemed full of a rage and contempt which must burst forth.

The girl before him, strikingly beautiful as she was, seemed to the old man's incomplete knowledge to have abandoned all claim to femininity. In his view, she was the cold-blooded inspirer of the killing of Bill Simmonds, and of that other man whose youth had matched her own; the unscrupulous cause of the almost certain deaths of Pete Noonan and stupid, good-natured Juggernaut Carr.

"I don't know whether it's your money or Pug Lowe's power," said Bill Garfield icily, "but I just been refused a warrant for the arrest of you an' Lowe an' several other people that I'm pretty sure are in with you. Not sufficient evidence against you, according to that shifty-eyed judge. 'There'll be blood flowin' by the gallon tonight, then,' I told him. And he told me to come back when it had flowed.

"Well, I ain't got anythin' to say but this: I—I ain't used to threatenin' women; but you—you ain't a woman. Women bring men into the world, an' keep 'em alive when they're here. You're just a killer—like a bad horse, an' for the same reason; pride, obstinacy, an' contempt for everybody but yourself. That bein' so, I tell you this: If Pug Lowe an' the rest of your ruffians kill either of them boys on that land, you'll get out of this part of Texas. It don't come natural to a man that's been a peace-officer all his life to step outside the law, but you've stopped the law's clock, it seems, an'—an'— Well, that's all. This part of the country'll be too hot to hold you."

The girl's eyes dilated.

"How can you say that?" she cried. "How can you hold me responsible for what Pug Lowe does?"

"The Vigilantes give them two boys a second warnin' to get off that land," said Bill Garfield. "Who's interested in gettin' possession of that land?"

"It was I," the girl answered. "But—but that warning wasn't in my name. Oh, believe me. When Lowe came back last night and told me what he had done, I discharged him. He has left my service."

Mr. Garfield regarded her with a cold blue eye.

"Wher' you goin' now?" he demanded.

Lucy Ransome bit her lip. Very obviously she had been sincere when she

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disclaimed any desire for the possession of the land at the cost of violence; but equally obvious, to the old man's eyes, her desire for the land remained. Perhaps, having been brought to think, the girl had decided that the price of plain murder was too much to pay for the attainment of her ambitions. But the ambition and the pride which prompted it, remained the same.

"There's worse things than murder," said Mr. Garfield softly, after a long look at the girl's face.

"Are they any concern of yours?"

Mr. Garfield's eyes did not waver.

"No," he said. "I don't set myself up to protect anybody from anythin' worse than death. The really bad things that can happen to a man—the takin' away of his faith in women, for instance—are beyond me, I figure. Good day."

The girl started as if she had been struck; or as if suddenly, an omniscient voice from the dead had addressed her. Remarks of Bill Garfield's sometimes did produce that effect, though so far from being dicta of the dead, they were merely sayings made possible by an unusually long life.

"What do you mean?" gasped Lucy Ransome.

But, having laboriously pointed Tony in the direction he desired, the old sheriff was busy prodding the aged horse into movement. This accomplished, without a backward look, he shambled away in a dust cloud down the Three Pines Trail.

It was twenty minutes' ride from that place to Pete Noonan's hut, yet it was a full half-hour before Juggernaut, staring out of the tent, descried the girl on the brow of the last hill, approaching. For ten minutes after the sheriff had left her, she had sat her horse, thinking; struggling with herself it seemed, almost as she had struggled on the porch the night before. Once she had turned her pony about as if to ride home again, then setting her lips, she had swung him about and started at a trot for the contested land.

"She can't cross that line, Pete!"

Pete Noonan was already outside the tent. Lucy, seeing him mount, halted her pony fifty yards the other side of the boundary brook. She sat there quite still while the red-haired youth rode up to her.

"Good day," he said—just as he had said it the day before.

For a moment Lucy Ransome's eyes dropped before his then they rose and met them with a look strangely at variance with her words. It was hard, unnatural, as if by a great effort she were forcing her eyes to share in her playing of a part.

"Won't you forgive me?" she said.

For an instant, Peter Noonan hesitated.

"Unless—unless you're going to send me right away," the girl went on, "can't we—can't we ride somewhere? That man in the tent is watching us, and——"

"The general idea, miss," said Pete Noonan, "is for him to see that nobody shoots any bullets into me, or anythin'. May seem a bit rigorous to you, but then it ain't our property we're protectin', an' we have to be careful."

The girl blushed hotly.

"Do you mean you think that I—" And then, remembering the events of only the day before, she stopped.

"I don't particularly hold you responsible for yesterday," said Pete slowly, "because it wasn't the kind of thing you'd do, left to yourself. But—I've got to be careful."

"I give you my word of honor," said Lucy Ransome, "that——"

"I take it. But are you goin' to answer for what might be done without your orders? Goin' to answer for Pug Lowe, for instance?"

It was strange to see how, since that whip had scarred Pete's face, the dominance as between these two, had changed from the lasher to the lashed. Altogether, the situation as the girl and the man faced each other over the flickering ears of their ponies, in the midst of the blazing landscape, was peculiar. Pete Noonan, laying down conditions, did so shamefacedly, as if it were a matter of painful duty; and Lucy Ransome, pleading, seemed to be doing so with a mental reservation which made her exquisitely uncomfortable.

Why beat about the bush? They were in love; Pete helplessly, save for a determination that this dangerous and involuntary emotion should not interfere with his duty; the girl unknowingly, conscious only that in the actual presence of this young man the plan of campaign she had formed seemed miserable, tawdry and hateful. Yet to this plan of campaign, her pride and habit of having her own way held her mercilessly.

"I cannot answer for Lowe," she said, dropping her eyes, "for I discharged him last night. He—he——"

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"Yes?"

"There was that business of the arrow," said the girl, looking up again, "and then I had forbidden him to use the Vigilantes. When he told me of having sent you this second warning—against my orders—he said that he was going to use them, willy-nilly. I said I would not allow it—that I would let the land go first. Then, he said that if I would he wouldn't, and—and——"

"Why wouldn't he?" asked Pete Noonan, his hands tight about his bridle.

"Because—he said—he—he was looking after his own interests as well as mine. He said he had planned to—to marry me."

"What?" growled Pete, red rising in his cheeks.

The girl looked at him steadily.

"It's a very disgusting subject," she said, "I—you forced me to mention it. Do you trust me enough now to ride a little way?"

Pete shook out his bridle, and the two ponies, side by side, started toward the ridge which overlooked the valley.

"That terrible business yesterday—I—" the girl was saying, as the horses moved off.

And then for nearly an hour, Juggernaut Carr, sitting in the tent-door, bit his nails furiously and vacillated between determinations to ride after his young partner, and to stay where he was, on guard. Was Pete riding into ambush, as he and his companion rode over the ridge's skyline, out of sight? Or was the girl's aim to decoy both men off the land, so that waiting henchmen of hers could rush on and take formal possession? Juggernaut's brain was not equal to the problem. This being so, he sat still, glowering at the point where the riders had disappeared, perspiring violently and praying for the return of King James.

Fifty minutes later, his prayer was answered. Stepping out of the tent to take a circular survey of the boundaries, the big man saw the gambler's pony slip out of the mesquite scrub which fringed the Bar T side of the land, and as King James waved his hand in greeting, start at an easy lope across the flat.

And at the same moment, silhouetted sharply against a sky into which the westering sun was already sending tones of orange, red and violet, the forms of Pete Noonan and Lucy Ransome appeared on top of the ridge. They were fully a mile away from the tent in the valley, yet some instance, some telepathic perception, perhaps, of the drama which was playing itself out between those two, rooted Juggernaut in his tracks, and focused all his attention on them. King James too, stared at the recognizable silhouettes so far ahead of him, and a fine frown came between his eyes.

Up there on the crest of the hill, a similar frown marked the forehead of Pete Noonan.

"Look at me!" he was saying to the girl, as the ponies came to a halt, their heads together.

But the striking black eyes which had from time to time during that hour of strangely halting conversation, looked into his face in a way which had made his heart thump suffocatingly, and then seem to stop, remained downcast.

"You say," said the boy with the red hair hoarsely—his throat and mouth were quite dry, and a strange paralysis seemed to clog his tongue, "that you're afraid for me if I stay here. Afraid Pug Lowe'll come an' try to wipe us out anyway. Is that it?"

The lowered head nodded.

"Well?"

At last Lucy Ransome looked up, and as her eyes met Peter's, her face changed suddenly. For an instant, it seemed, she had regained the poise for which she had fought so desperately on the porch at Stony Springs the night before—the resolve to win in this battle for her own proud way, at whatever cost, but before the young man's gaze the expression changed. It was as if suddenly, as an electric spark may bring about an explosion, the glance which had passed between her and Peter Noonan had shattered and nullified the plan on which she had been working. Her lips trembled, the cold, determined look in her eyes changed to one of puzzlement—almost of fear.

"I—I—" she began.

"Are you goin' to tell me," asked the red-haired man, "that all this concern for my safety comes from— There's only one thing that it could come from. An' that's——"

Until a moment ago, this had been the climax of Lucy Ransome's campaign. This poor, low-bred fool should flatter himself that she—the descendant of a British nobleman—was in love with him. In face of such priceless condescension, he would of course obey her request to seek safety—leave the land unguarded.

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But, with victory seemingly hers at the cost of an affirmative word—a mere look—Lucy flung an arm across her eyes.

"No, no!" she cried, as if in pain.

Pete Noonan said nothing for perhaps half a minute. Then, taking off his hat, he spoke slowly.

"I'm obliged to you for relentin', miss," he said, with an odd catch in his voice. "Seems to me, if you'd played this game out to the end, I couldn't ha' stood it. You see, I am in love with you, an' if you'd taken advantage of it, same as you planned to, to vamp me off my duty, it would pretty nigh have broke my heart."

The girl, her face still hidden, sobbed convulsively.

"Juggernaut was outside your window at Stony Springs last night," went on the accusing voice. "We were warned to watch this lawyer guy. Juggernaut heard you say you'd a plan to get possession of the land. I kind of prayed it wouldn't be anythin' like this, but——"

The girl winced and tore her arm away from her eyes. Two great tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Oh, don't—" she began.

Pete turned his face away. He was a strong man and, as such, knew the limits of his strength.

"Good-by," he said, shaking out his bridle.

His pony snorted, swung its head, and took a step forward.

"Wait—wait—" cried the girl behind him.

Had he looked back—but he did not. Instead, his face contracted into lines of pain, he spurred his pony blindly and furiously. It leaped forward.

"Peter!" came a faint cry after him. But the thunder of hoofs drowned it, and a second later he was out of call.

King James and Juggernaut—the former with his hands so tightly clenched that the brown skin over the knuckles was white—saw the girl on the hill-top fling her arm again for an instant across her eyes, then turn her pony and ride out of sight below the skyline. Again the rank growth of pride had been mown down; again the moment for the sowing of the ground with salt, had passed; again, neglected, the weeds were springing to new and stronger growth.

As she galloped toward Stony Springs—blindly, recklessly, as Pete had galloped down the slope—Lucy Ransome's mind was a whirl of bitter thoughts. Now she knew that she loved this—this low fellow. And at the moment of that discovery, he had scorned her—mocked her——

Her mouth had set in its old hard line by the time she flashed past the fork of the trail where, earlier, she had met Bill Garfield. She was once more the daughter of her mother's training—save in one respect.

She could not stop the tears.

THE dusk had fallen—a translucent blue veil over the sky, a soft grey mist over the grasslands and the hillsides—before the three men in the tent had finished their council of war; or rather, before King James, his finger-tips reflectively together, had finished his remarks on the defense of the valley. Juggernaut, throughout, had sat on the ground looking up at his boss with eyes very like those of Lemon Meringue, who lay with his head on his paws near the door. Pete Noonan, since his return, had been strangely silent, staring at the backs of his powerful hands.

"Bill Simmonds told me to guard this lot," he had said, when King James had fired a direct question at him, "and I'm goin' to do it. That's all."

King James, nodding gravely, had asked no more questions, but proceeded with his theme.

"The legal fight for this land's won—and our side's won it. Never mind how I know. Just as soon as the court convenes tomorrow morning, the case is over, if we stay in possession till then. If we're not in possession then—why, the decision's still the same of course, but the whole legal business will have to start over again. Hearings on eviction warrants, adjournments—the whole business. They'll throw every obstacle in the way—it may take years. And as I figure it now is the time the Vigilantes will get reckless. You've had two warnings, you say. Tonight, the whole gang's likely to swoop down and make a brute grab at the land. Three of us wouldn't be much use."

Juggernaut nodded gravely.

"So that," said King James, "after I had been to Stony Springs and found its young mistress out, and accordingly not to be argued with, and Pug Lowe invisible, and therefore most probably up to deviltry, I made my preparations. I've been around

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the ranches and reminded the boys of how Tom Browne and that other boy were hanged. And so when the Vigilantes come, they will have an unpleasant surprize."

He glanced at Pete Noonan, who had looked up suddenly.

"What is it, boss?" asked Juggernaut.

"There are forty, or fifty exceedingly grim cowpunchers concealed in that mesquite," said King James. "And when the first shot sounds, they come out. Need I say more?"

"No," said Pete Noonan, "but I want to say something. You seem to take kind of an interest in Miss Ransome. She ain't in this."

King James nodded.

"So I understood from Bill Garfield," he said, "who, by the way, seems to be prevented by a fear of a certain unjust judge from joining us tonight. I hear Miss Ransome claims to have discharged Pug Lowe. Why?"

He shot the word at Pete Noonan in a way that permitted of no evasive answer. Pete Noonan, gazing into the older man's face, then glancing quickly at Juggernaut, got to his feet.

"I'll tell you—outside," he said.

King James rose to follow, but Juggernaut caught his sleeve.

"One minute, boss," he said, his brow corrugated with the effort of a thought.

Juggernaut also rose.

"I been thinkin'," he said. "These punchers, boss—they ain't got any interest in this land. Pete's got to guard it because he said he would; we're on the job because you want to take some of the pride out of that Ransome girl, the way I figure it."

"Well?" asked the gambler.

"Well, if you think the girl's any of our business," said Juggernaut, "I'm satisfied. But these punchers ain't concerned with her nor the land neither. An' some of 'em's goin' to get hurt, likely. Is it fair to bring 'em into our private quarrels?"

"Do you think I would do such a thing?" asked King James icily. "You fool, are the Vigilantes a private quarrel? Aren't they a menace to the whole state? Haven't they hanged honest men, and gone fifty-fifty with robbers? Haven't they corrupted a judge, so that Bill Garfield daren't get after them without a warrant, which the judge won't issue? The question was whether the country should rise against them *en masse*, now, or string the fight against them through years, as they did down on the Rio, and up in Arizona. Do you think I let other men fight for me?"

Juggernaut made a gesture.

Without another word, like a man whose conscience justifies him without need to be convinced by his own oration, King James stepped outside the tent, his hand on Peter Noonan's arm.

"Well, why did she discharge him?" demanded the gambler.

"I figure," said Pete Noonan slowly, "that you love her too. That's why I'm tellin' you. You might get killed, an' I don't want you to blame her for it. Am I right about—that?"

King James smiled a little.

"In a way," he said.

"Well—she fired him 'cause he said he was goin' to use the Vigilantes on us whether she liked it or not. So——"

The lean body of the gambler tensed suddenly.

"Why was he going to do that?" he snapped. "What good would the getting of the land do *him*, if she——"

Pete Noonan looked at the ground.

"He told her he figured to marry her," he said.

A grasp of steel crushed the muscles of his arm agonizingly.

"You fool!" cried King James. "She told you that this afternoon, and you're still here?"

"Why——"

"A desperate man like Lowe—she's alone at the ranch-house—he has that idea in his mind——"

The daze which had clouded Pete Noonan's mind since he had parted from Lucy at the crest of the ridge, cleared suddenly into an awful perspicuity.

"You mean——"

"I mean he's got a rich stake to play for, a corrupt judge behind him, half a hundred ruffians to fight for him. He'll carry her off while his Vigilantes hold us here, and marry her by force! You fool!"

A growl of fury came from the lips of Noonan. He turned on his heel undecidedly and then, with a leap, snatched the bridle of his horse and vaulted into the saddle.

"Too late!" cried King James, a break in his voice. "They're here!"

The moon had shot down a clear beam, which illumined the ridge above the valley,

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just at the point where the red-haired boy and Lucy had parted that afternoon. The night wind, cutting over the high land, had cleared its skyward edge of mist and on it had suddenly appeared, black against the blue sky, the black, irregular mass of a body of horsemen. For the moment, this troop was at the halt; now it began to move.

At the same instant, the revolver King James had drawn, belched its streak of flame and roared its heavy report into the air. As a crackling from the distant mesquite answered the signal, the cavalcade on the hillside abandoned its bunched formation and began to spread into a wide line.

"They're across the way you'd have to take—" cried King James.

"Then," snarled Pete Noonan, "I'm goin' through them. Good-by!"

Apparently, he was not alone in this determination. Across the flat from the mesquite, grimly silent, save for the thunder of hoofs was scudding the cowboy contingent, rifles glinting in the moonlight. Spurring his pony violently, the red-haired man with the grim white face, cut into the line of that terrible advance, fifty yards ahead of the main body.

Bridle hooked on elbow, a gun in each hand, he stared at the line of Vigilantes, now a streak of darker gray against the pearl-color of the mist. The shock of collision would take place the other side of the brook which marked the edge of the land he was to guard. And as a swelling roar, like a battle-cry, rose from the men behind him, he felt oddly certain that the battle would be decided on the far side of the brook. No Vigilante would set foot on the land. And a burden seemed to slip from his mind.

But what were the punchers yelling for? Not for him, they didn't know him——

He glanced back. Ten yards behind him, hat off, rode King James, the silver hair on his temples gleaming. And five yards behind him, his vast bulk hunched forward to urge his small pony into the greatest possible speed came Juggernaut.

"Watch for the brook!" yelled Pete, as his pony leaped it.

And at that moment, as the first rifle shot rang out he saw Juggernaut give a convulsive jerk backward in his saddle, claw at his pony's mane and then thud to the earth. And the battle-yell of the cowboys behind changed as suddenly to a dull murmur of rage.

He turned his head forward again.

Twenty yards—ten—five. Another shot was fired, and a bullet hummed past his ear. He glanced back to see whether it had struck King James; but the gambler, almost at his side, was leveling a revolver. Then from all around, it seemed, came a burst of wild shouts mingled with shots thunderously close at hand.

"There's the two—don't let 'em by—kill 'em—you know what the master said——"

A white face, convulsed with fury, was within arm's length of Pete's face; the reeking muzzle of a revolver was under his nose. The weapon roared, and then the white face suddenly took to itself a gaping hole in the middle of the forehead, and vanished from sight.

"I've shot him—I've shot him," Pete told himself gaspingly.

Another face was before him. He felt his revolver kick, and the blow-back from the cartridges sear the fork of his hand. His pony tramped over something soft and stumbled, then staggered still more violently as another horse crashed into him shoulder to shoulder. Pete swung his right arm, weighted with his heavy gun, behind him. The ring and swivel of the butt clicked as they smashed into a face.

"Git up!" gasped Noonan, driving home his spurs.

Now the battle was behind him, and freed from the hypnosis of the hazard of death, instinct made him pull on the bridle. Men were fighting back there—ought not he to be with them? What was he doing——

A heavy hand fell on his shoulder and pushed him forward.

"Get ahead!" came King James' voice unsteadily. "What are you stopping for? There's no time to be lost!"

A sudden concerted spatter of revolver shots came from behind them. A man shrieked.

"I oughta be back there——"

His pony started convulsively forward, as the gambler's revolver-hammer spike pricked its flank.

"Any man ought to do what's required of him," gasped King James. "Those men are doing what's their part. Yours is——"

A vision of Pug Lowe's face—cruel, resolute, desirous, floated before the young man's eyes.

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"Are you coming?" he asked, his voice showing the snarl of rage which the vision had brought to his lips.

"It's liable to be a two-man job," said King James, "and—I'm interested."

They were at the crest of the hill. Below them, the mist eddied as the horses plunged and galloped, the earth shook with the shock of battle, and the darkness was pricked continually with the red spurts of revolver-fire.

"Come on!" snapped Pete Noonan.

And side by side, they scudded down the slope which led away from the beleaguered strip of land, toward Stony Springs and beyond, to Judge Merryweather's.

It seemed to the young man, scarcely a minute until their horses, trembling, sweating, and dripping lather from their outblown lips, were before the broad porch of the ranch-house. A Chinese servant, trembling, salaaming, was stammering answers to King James' questions.

"Missa Lowe come with othah man—knock Wong Lo down—take Missy Lucy on horses——"

"Which way?" cut in the gambler.

The Chinese gestured feebly.

"Come on!" roared King James. "They've gone to that judge's."

A low-hanging branch of a rose-bush, swinging out from a corner of the house, tore across Pete Noonan's face, the sharp pain rousing him out of the peculiar red reverie into which he had fallen. A mist of crimson had seemed to hang before his eyes ever since King James had told him his suspicions back there before the tent. The young man's hand flew to his brow. There was no blood there, though his cheek was pulpy to the touch. And suddenly he realized that he had, like the old Berserks, seen red—the spiritual red that means killing. And he knew, deep within himself even now that the mist had cleared, that the moment he saw Lowe he would kill him.

"Missa Garfield—" shouted the Chinese, his words made almost indistinguishable by the distance.

King James had heard, however.

"Bill Garfield's on the trail," he said. "O God, if he's only early enough! For we—we're going to be late."

They thundered on. Away to the left, silver in the moonlight, rose Bald Knob. Now they were passing through Prairie Dog. Now those lights were past, and they were galloping along a hard white road. And there were more lights—the lights of a single house just ahead.

"That's it!" cried King James.

It was perhaps only during that last hundred yards that Pete Noonan was fully conscious, but for that brief space of time he was abnormally clear-headed and calm. Expertly, he thumbed new cartridges into his right-hand gun, counted the ponies tied to the front rail of the porch of the judge's house, noted there were five, and saw that the judge's front door was open.

The yellow light of a hanging oil lamp streamed out across the porch and onto the grass. It was at the end of this lane of light that King James halted his pony and with a strange deliberation, dismounted. Pete was but an instant behind him. He swung from his horse, his gun ready, then looked in at the open door.

King James' grip fell on his wrist.

"Steady—steady!" said that masterful voice.

The grip did not relax as together, they climbed the porch steps and entered the room. Within the house a strange, tense stillness prevailed which, for a moment, as they stood in the doorway, seemed to engulf and paralyze King James and the red-haired youth whose gun hand he held firmly at his side.

The furnishings of the room were simple—a wide library table of mission oak, over which hung the lamp, two or three chairs and a settee. But the immobile drama before the eyes of the newcomers required no stage-setting. Behind the mission table, his mouse-gray hair glinting with an occasional speck of silver in the lamplight, the smile on his debased face made horrible by the deep shadows of his wrinkles, stood the judge.

To his right hand, Pug Lowe smiled evilly, and near Lowe, a tall man with the loose, protruding lips of the criminal epileptic, grinned repulsively. Old Bill Garfield and his deputy, Jake Henson, the younger man awed, the old man with a flush of anger in his parchment cheeks, had turned from conversation with the judge, to stare at the intruders.

Then Pete Noonan's eyes left the scene in general to focus on one point of it. For on the settee behind Lowe and his companion, her face white, her eyes terrified,

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yet with her lips set in that proud line Peter had come to know so well, sat Lucy Ransome. And at her feet, on the carpet, gleamed the gold of a wedding ring.

Old Bill Garfield was the first to speak. And it was to Pete, as he stared across the room, that the old man addressed himself.

"I'm mighty sorry," he said, "but we was too late. I—well, I was comin' to see how you was gettin' on down there when I saw this skunk part company from a bunch of others where the trail forks, and start to Stony Springs. Followed the other bunch for a while until I figured what he might be after, then trailed him. Got here just as he"—indicating the judge—"pronounced 'em man an' wife."

"Whom," said the judge, in a soft voice that purred like a cat's, "let no man put asunder."

"No man?" asked King James.

There was a terrible silence.

Suddenly the gambler's powerful frame was heaved to one side.

"Let me—" screamed the harsh voice of Pete Noonan.

A moment's struggle, and the revolver which had been half-upraised was forced down until it pointed at the floor. Bill Garfield stepped forward and expertly snatched the other gun out of Pete's belt.

"Leave this to me," said King James very slowly, his eyes again on the criminal trio which flanked the table. There were little beads of perspiration on his forehead, and his mouth was a thin, straight line.

"Aside—for a moment—from this matrimonial business," he said slowly. "I see some one here whom I have been looking for. You with the slack mouth! I heard of you in Longhorn City. You killed Bill Simmonds! Don't you move!"

As if by magic, a revolver had appeared in the gambler's hand. The black muzzle was very steady.

"Are you going to swear out a warrant for his arrest?" asked the judge, a tinge of alarm in the softness of his tones. "Because, if you touch that trigger, I'll see you hang for murder, you gambler!"

King James smiled very slightly.

"Possibly—possibly," he said. "But from what I can see of you, Mr. Judge, if I swear out a warrant, I shan't see our friend yonder hang. And I think he has lived long enough. Perfectly still, please. That applies to you also, Mr. Garfield."

"I ain't movin'," said the old sheriff from dry lips.

"And now as to this marriage," said King James, "it is perfectly legal?"

Pug Lowe laughed. For the first and last time that evening—for his last time on earth, in fact—he spoke.

"You bet it is," he sneered. "An' this little piece of fluff behind me——"

Accustomed as Mr. Garfield was to quick and fatal action, even his trained eye could not follow what happened within, it seemed, the first thousandth of the next second. He heard the red-haired youth on whom his eyes were fixed give a cry like the call of a trapped puma; he saw the hand which held the revolver twist itself irresistibly out of King James' grasp and then, as the bellow of two shots deafened his ears, the young man's body, hurled aside as if by a thunderbolt, crashed into him, and bore him to the floor. There came the thunder of one more shot, and the sound of a terrible choking gurgle. Then, cutting like a knife across a deathly silence, came a girl's long-drawn scream.

Old Bill Garfield staggered to his feet.

Erect before the settee on which she had sat spellbound with horror, stood Lucy Ransome. Before her, motionless, lay the bodies of Pug Lowe and the murderer of Bill Simmonds. And quite still, just where he had been before that appalling moment, stood King James, the revolver still reeking in his hand.

No smoke was curling up from the muzzle of the revolver which lay near the hand of the fallen Noonan and Mr. Garfield realized that the gambler had hurled Pete aside to save him, not from being killed, but from killing.

"Murder!" came the voice of the judge, a mere dry croak now, as he extended a shaking hand toward the gambler. "Murder! Arrest him!"

Obedience to the commands of the law ingrained in him, Jake Henson dropped a hand to his belt.

"No need for that," said King James, very slowly. "I'll come along quite peaceably—when I'm ready. Is that boy badly hurt, Mr. Garfield?"

The old sheriff glanced down. A bullet had plowed along Pete Noonan's scalp, a trickle of blood was soaking into the carpet.

"Some," he said.

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"That should clear me of any murder charge," said King James reflectively, his eyes on the girl by the settee, who stared at him with a horror seldom seen on a human face. "If I hadn't knocked that boy down when I did, there'd have been murder. He's inclined to be hot-tempered. But that groove on his head seems to prove one of those gentlemen had a gun out."

"Let it prove what it will," snarled the judge, "you'll hang. And if the sheriff——"

Like a flash, he had snapped a revolver from the table-drawer before him. The next instant, with a crash from King James' gun, it had flown into a corner.

"I said I would come along peaceably when I was ready," said the gambler's even voice. "And I'm no liar. Nor am I a conniver at abduction, nor a taker of bribes, nor a confederate of murderers for a share of their loot. Bear that in mind, Mr. Judge, when you add perjury to your little offences."

"You'll hang!" screamed the judge. "You came here to kill those men—you've killed them! You'll hang as high as Haman! Arrest him, you officers! Arrest him!"

The rhythmic beat of hoofs was approaching outside. They stopped, there was a buzz of voices, and a moment later King James turned to smile at Pie-Face Lammermoor as, with a puzzled expression, the big cowboy poked his head through the door. There was a bandage made of a red bandanna, about his brow, his face was grimed with powder-smoke.

"How goes it?" asked King James.

Pie-Face Lammermoor nodded and half-smiled. Behind him, half a dozen others crowded the door.

"Licked 'em to a frazzle—Juggernaut's all right—only lost four men—" came a chorus.

Then as the appalling scene in that room flashed on their eyes, there was a dead silence.

"And Mr. Pug Lowe is dead," said King James slowly. "And Bill Simmonds is avenged. And—" his eyes fastened on Lucy Ransome's face, as if he were searching her soul—"the battle of the land between the Bar T and Stony Springs has been won—by the humble."

Lucy Ransome did not move.

"I am now ready," said King James, handing his revolver to Bill Garfield, "for arrest. But—" he looked back at Lucy—"one thing first. This boy lying here, Miss Ransome—he needs care. I suppose you'll take him back with you to Stony Springs?"

There was no answer.

"He's askin' you if you'll take this wounded man back with you to Stony Springs," said Old Bill Garfield.

Every eye in the room was turned upon the girl; those of the newly arrived punchers with frank amazement. Pete Noonan had fought the girl over the land—he was her enemy—why should she take him to Stony Springs?

"She's in love with him!" gasped a voice from the doorway.

In that instant Lucy Ransome was herself again; or rather, not herself, but the marble effigy she had been taught was so much preferable to herself. She was in love with the boy who lay there so limply, her heart seemed bursting with the desire to pick up his head in her arms. Yet—her teeth sank into her lip—he had humiliated her, beaten her, left her alone that afternoon, when just a minute more would have averted all this tragedy. And now a common murderer was telling her to do the things she longed to do for him, and cowmen all over dirt and blood were saying that her pride had not prevailed against——

"No," she said, with a break in her voice.

"Eh?" demanded Bill Garfield. "You mean——"

"Why should I take him with me?" cried the girl wildly. "What is he to me?"

"He loves you," broke in the stern voice of King James, as the gambler strode forward until he was close to the girl, who shrank from him as from some unclean thing.

"And you love him! I can see it in your eyes. And you're afraid to say it. The same cursed pride that wrecked my life has its hold on you still. If you desert him now, do you think he'll ever see you again? I command you, take him to that ranch, and nurse him as a man who's too good for you."

"You—you—" gasped the girl, flinging away the hand the big man had laid on her shoulder. "You murderer! You gambler! You command me——"

She stopped suddenly, panting. There was something in the gray eyes before her which froze her utterance.

"If it must be, it must," said the man's voice slowly. "I had planned to spare

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you this. I thought one defeat would make you think—check your miserable pride and make you see yourself as a human being again. You've lost your fight for the land, you've cost a life that was better than your own, though God knows that was no part of the plan. You meant to be the greatest landowner around here, didn't you—in spite of everybody and everything. I thought that when you found a little strip of land and some title deeds could balk you that you'd realize—that you'd be humbled. The things that have happened here this night should have beaten you to the dust, yet here you stand, proud as Lucifer among the men you've killed—men that your obstinacy has hastened to their end—threatening to ruin this boy who's nearly died for you, as a sop to your dignity.

"Who am I to speak to you thus? I'm the man who was broken just as you plan to break this boy. You've called me a gambler and a murderer. The worse, the better for my purpose. For such as I am, I'm your father!"

Already, foreseeing the end, the girl's fingers were at her lips. Now, as her eyes stared at the grim man a terrible cry came from her. And then, with a collapse as sudden as if she had fainted, she sank to her knees by the table, and with her cheek against its dark wood, burst into helpless, uncontrolled weeping. Her grief, her shame before these people she had considered lower animals, was complete, she made no attempt, even, to hide her eyes from them. Her face was like that of a beaten child.

King James looked at her for a moment, then with a queer wry smile about his mouth, turned to Old Bill Garfield.

"I'm ready," he said hoarsely; "let's go."

HALL the draggled array of punchers which had survived the battle by the brook were profuse and profane with offers of money wherewith to buy legal assistance, cigarets, and the soap which Three Pines Jail—being no more than a shed outside Bill Garfield's store—did not supply to its prisoners. But it was not until they had dispersed, and the middle-aged man who, from looking younger than his years, had come to look older, had sat in the dark for half an hour, that Old Bill Garfield said his say.

His ostensible errand, when he entered the jail, was to bring King James a drink, on the ground that emotion was apt to make a man thirsty.

"Had kids m'self," the old sheriff mumbled.

The prisoner made no answer.

"That judge'll pull powerful with his evidence," added the old man after an interval. "An'—an' them Vigilantes—had friends. Jury. Looks bad."

The prisoner gave a short laugh, which sounded strange in the darkness.

"Pretty bad," he assented. "Still—if I only knew——"

"I daresay," said Mr. Garfield pensively, "that you'd escape, if you could now, wouldn't you?"

Again King James gave that short laugh.

"Then I must be very, very careful," said Mr. Garfield, "on no account to leave the key of this calaboose in the lock when I go out, or forget to lock the door, or anything. I shall be goin' to bed in a few minutes, an' I sleep so sound— Well, good night."

He knew that his prisoner was standing up and trembling.

"I must lock that door," the old sheriff reminded himself, as he closed it behind him.

Yet, by some strange freak of age, he apparently forgot to turn the key.

So that an hour later, King James, mounted on his own horse, which by an inexplicable coincidence had been left grazing outside the prison door, was passing Bald Knob on his way to Mexico, and looking up longingly, it seemed, at a thin wire which strung across the mesa on poles, led across his trail. Under the wire, he halted, and stared to the right, where glowed the window-light of a small cabin. Some hopeful soul was trying a mine on Bald Knob. For a moment he hesitated, then pulling sharply on the bridle, he turned his pony to the shack.

"Got a telephone?" he asked the man who came smiling to the door.

"Sure," said the miner. "Only I dunno whether you can use it. Last fifteen minutes some skirt's been callin' Doc Brewer on the wire—party line, y'know—an' sobbin', an' weepin', an' beseechin' him to come an' save somebody's life. An' I can't figure who the skirt is. Lucy Ransome's the only woman on this line, an' she——"

"I guess not," said King James, dismounting; "but what's her number?"

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He gave it into the transmitter and waited, a queer smile still on his face.

"Who's this?" he said, after a moment.

A blurred Chinese voice came through the receiver.

"I want to speak to Miss Lucy."

The Oriental voice droned protestingly.

"Velly solly—Missy Lucy up-stairs make weep over shot gellamun. No will speak anybody—onlee cry."

King James gravely nodded his head at the miner.

"All right," he told the telephone. "I just wanted to say good-by. Tell her I said good-by."

He hung up.

"Much obliged," he smiled at the miner.

"Goin' far?"

"Pretty far," said King James. "Pretty far."

It was indeed a long journey—away forever, from everything he loved. Yet when he spurred his pony forward to begin the journey, he was still smiling.

# MEDICINE-MEN

*by* **H. P.**

IN ALL times some degree of healing power has been ascribed to the priesthood. Medicine-men, mystery-men, shamans, or by whatever name they might be called, were to be found in every tribe of North American Indians. Some of these knew the medicinal qualities of roots and herbs and practiced rude surgery, and others were "fakers." The latter usually enjoyed but a brief vogue. Sometimes the healer was a woman.

In some tribes there were two classes—the possessor of supernatural power, who invoked the aid of spirits, and the herbalist. The Dakota styled the first the "mystery-man," the second the "grass-root man." The Apache designations are "wonderful" and "medicine." The Navajo styled the first "singer," the second, "maker of medicines."

A practitioner of the first class was also a magician and a sleight-of-hand artist. A medicine-man of the Walapai, a Yuman tribe on the Colorado river, says John G. Bourke in an article on the Apache medicine-men, would cast a bullet in a mold containing a small piece of paper. The healer would have an Indian fire this bullet at him, and the lead, because of the paper, would split into pieces and do him no harm.

Another would secretly fasten the end of a roll of sinew to a twig, swallow the ball and hold the twig between his teeth. After the sinew had softened and expanded "because of the heat and moisture of the stomach" the magician would astound his friends, Bourke says, by drawing out yard after yard, declaring he did not need intestines, and was pulling them all out.

Many tribes had medicine-men who boasted their power to kill men at a distance. The Cherokee shamans had one sacred formula set aside for this form of homicide. Any medicine-man of the first order must have his bag of tricks, such as handling and swallowing fire, thrusting arrows down the throat (Ojibway), producing instantaneous growth in plants (substituting artificial plant for seedling by aid of blanket and aided by dim camp-fire). Potawatomi shamans produced phenomena in their lodges and were exceedingly skilful in ventriloquial effects.

Except where the medicine-men were designated by clan or gens prerogative—as among the Shawnee and Cherokee—any ambitious young man could set up shop providing he could make his people believe he had the "power." A succession of failures, however, were visited with penalties never dreamed of by our civilized physicians, even death being the price when too many patients were lost. A medicine-man who relied on the supernatural was also a prophet. His only alibi when his guess went wrong was to claim some one with more powerful spiritual aid had antagonized him and his people.

To name the thief and recover stolen property was another important duty of the medicine-man or shaman. For every call upon him the Cherokee shaman had his sacred formula. In many tribes the spirit-doctor—so called by the Oregon tribes—were crystal gazers.

The Pawnee, Mandans and Minnetaree venerated the skin of an albino calf, and their medicine-men were fortunate who had such in their medicine or sacred bundle.

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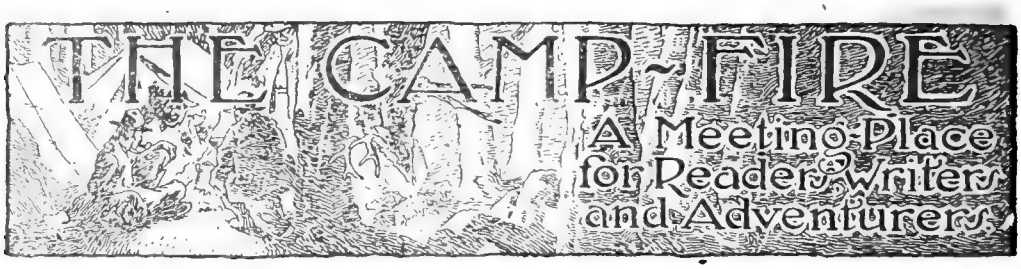


**Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.**

**We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.**

**But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.**

**Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.**

**If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.**

UNCLE FRANK HUSTON writes that quite a lot of you have dropped in on him at 528 14th Street, San Diego, California. Says his brain is in a whirl trying to adjust his palaver to the "objectives" of Olancho, San Blas, Marquesas, Patagonia, Siberia, Upper Yukon, Stickeen, Spotted Tail's Camp, Wounded Knee, etc. I'm glad you've been dropping in on him and he's a whole lot gladder. "What a fine, upstanding bunch, and so —— young and enthusiastic! 'Hyah, Uncle Frank? Glad tuh meecha!' I hear those good words now in my sleep. And not a four-flusher among them to date! Some record.

"Texas leads for habitat. *Porque?* Then, wonder of wonders, New York! Tennessee shows up strong, but the interesting thing is that they are nearly all of 'way back American ancestry (throwbacks to pioneers?) or are Johnny Bulls. Chance for speculative thought in this. Only one Harp so far—he told me all the others had gone 'on the foorce.' One Frenchman, one 'wop,' as he termed himself, a couple of north of Spain 'conquistadores.' *Cosmopolite, non? Je vous assure.* And, strangest of all, *every* one of them has a stereotyped remark—'The —— foreigners are overrunning this country!' The 'wop' grinned at me like a Cheshire cat when he said it. Not one Swede. Heinie has been more than conspicuous by his absence."

Yes, Uncle Frank enjoys his visitors and likes them. Drop in on him if you're down his way.

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SOMETHING from G. A. Wells in connection with his story in this issue. Dynamite and some methods of detonating it are the subjects:

In my story I caused the white men to have recourse to dynamite in repelling the attack of natives. This stunt is not original with me, of course, and some of you, in reading other stories wherein this racket may have been used, might possibly have been curious to know just how dynamite for such a purpose is prepared.



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THE ordinary commercial dynamite comes in round sticks. Each stick is wrapped in heavy oil paper to protect it. Dynamite is made in several strengths, those most generally in use being forty and sixty per cent. The latter is a very dependable grade.

To shoot a stick of dynamite it is necessary to have a detonater. The detonater for battery firing comes ready prepared, with leading wires to hook up to the battery terminals or a battery trunk-line. The detonater used with a fuse is different. It is a small metal cylinder about one and one-half inches long and one-quarter of an inch in diameter. One end is closed, and at the bottom of this end is a small quantity of fulminate of mercury.

Fuses come in various sizes on spools or in coils and you cut off what you need. It also is made in various "times," that is, a given length of a given grade requires so many seconds or minutes to burn from end to end. It runs from slow to quick. The slow fuse burns like punk and the others more rapidly as you ascend the scale. The corresponding fuse for the quarter-inch size detonater is slightly smaller in diameter.

NOW to prepare your stick of dynamite for shooting as depicted in the story. With a knife cut or drill a hole two inches deep in one end of the stick. Insert your detonater, closed end down. Say you are using medium quick fuse. Cut off four inches of fuse from your coil. Insert one end of it into the detonater and see that it makes contact with the fulminate of mercury. Wad the dynamite about the detonater and the fuse to hold them firm.

You now have two inches of free fuse end, and two inches in the detonater. That gives you from ten to fifteen seconds to get rid of your stick of dynamite after lighting the fuse. That doesn't seem long, but it is plenty of time.

But when you are depending upon your dynamite to stop a rush of savages you can't stop every time to light the fuse with a match. You want something quicker and more dependable than a match flame. All right, slit your fuse at the free end a distance of three-quarters of an inch. You can slit it down the center or at the side. Now cut off three-quarters of an inch of ordinary sulphur match, retaining the head. Insert that in the slit in the fuse, head up, and bind fuse tightly about it with a piece of thread or string. The three-quarters of an inch of match-shank gives you something to grip with thumb and forefinger when you want to strike your match-head. Now, holding the upper end of the stick of dynamite in the heel of your hand, strike your match-head against a piece of sandpaper and heave away.

The idea of the match-head racket is threefold—convenience, rapidity and certainty. Always be sure that the match-head is flush with the tip of the fuse to insure ignition. If you light your match-head with a cigar end of course you don't need the shank of the match to hold while you strike the match-head. In that case you use merely the match-head. A match, you know, is always hottest when the sulphur flares, thus you can readily see the advantage of having your match-head directly against the end of the fuse.

SOME doubt was expressed by the editors as to whether a stick of dynamite exploded so close to one of the piles of the veranda would not cause more damage than I have stated. No, it wouldn't, and I say that from having shot dynamite under exactly that condition. Grant that the piles supporting the veranda were two-by-fours and a single stick of dynamite exploded within two feet of a pile would do little else than shake it out of line. It certainly would not splinter it. I know that from personal experience.

Dynamite has a reputation for destruction that it does not deserve. I have shot it under most conditions and know about what it will do. I have also made and shot nitro, and a shot of nitro of the same bulk as a stick of dynamite would have blown the entire bungalow into the sea. I have stood within a dozen feet of a stick of dynamite when it exploded, and have been within fifty yards of twenty-five pounds of the stuff when it went off. In the latter case the concussion knocked me off my feet.

I have shot dynamite with match-heads and with a battery. Another fellow and I put sixteen .32-Winchester bullets into a box of dynamite without result. I have thrown dozens of sticks of it at rocks without setting it off. Yet an old negro who has shot tons of the stuff told me about one of his assistants who, while drilling a hole in a stick, was blown to pieces. You can't always tell.

But, because I say dynamite isn't the tough customer it is generally supposed to be, don't get flip with it. There is enough force in one stick to kill half a dozen men when the force is applied right. And another thing. When you meet one of those innocent looking little detonators steer clear. A detonator holds more meanness in its innocent looking little self than anything else of its size in the world. Rattlesnakes are harmless compared with fulminate of mercury, and it takes only a drop to tear your hand off.—G. A. WELLS.

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HERE'S a greeting for one of our comrades from whom we heard at a previous Camp-Fire:

Jackson, Michigan.

While reading through "Camp-Fire," of the June 20th issue I noticed a letter from one of our brothers who is in stir, and I want to cheer him up a bit, so if you will kindly print the following letter in the Camp-Fire I will be obliged.

BROTHERS, will you please move over a bit so I can shake the hand of our brother Fred A. Burke (Prince Bob)? Thanks, gents. Put it there, Bob, old man. I'm powerful glad to meet you. You said you were a writer. Well, so am I—at least I think I am. Pard, you are a poet and any one that read your letter will agree with me.

But to get down to the meat of the letter I want to say that if there is anything that I can do for you, all you have to do is just let me know and I'll be proud to do it.

I infer that you are an adventurer and roamer. Well, so am I and I write poetry, in fact I am a "jack" of all trades and master of two, namely, steeple-jack and tractor engineer.

It would be of no use to say that I am sorry that you are in "College." I have been inside of two different State Pens and I have some conception of what you have to go through with. I am personally acquainted with several men that done their time. And they are Men, yes, Men, every one of them, and I am proud to call them friends. Just because a man has done time is no reason he should



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be an outcast. When your time is up you are square with the world and can look any man in the face.

When it comes to writing letters I'm not very good at it, so I will just say that I hope to hear from you and later on maybe meet you and really shake your hand. In the mean time keep up your courage, pal. From a friend, *Adios.*—WM. L. WHEELER, 332 Bates St., Jackson, Mich.

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FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Reginald Barker rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

I hardly know what to say. For many moons I have wished that I could become one of the Circle of those men of the sun-washed eyes, who love the far and silent places, whose fretful feet are never still as the long trails lure them on. At last, by being admitted to a seat by "Camp-Fire," I feel that I have come into my own.

I WAS born in England not long enough ago for Time to have silvered my hair. As a boy, I hated the towns. At nine years of age I was sent to a school in France, at a town then unknown to Fame, but which since—well I guess you all know of St. Mihiel.

At thirteen I ran away from home, since then I have been a green hand upon a whaler, a lumberjack, a trapper, a brickmaker, a painter, a cowboy, a miner and prospector from the land of the silver spruce to the sand lands of Quijotoa. I have lived beneath the flag of every little nation between Canada and Ecuador, and if there is any kind of physical labor at which I have not worked during the past twenty-five years, I have yet to find it. I always wanted to be a writer, and for a long time I tried to write love stories and stories that "couldn't happen," and then it so happened that one night I came into my own. I was yarning to a circle of "high-brows" and I forgot myself and my hearers and did not know that their chatter had ceased and that they listened with open mouths as I told of a a cave-in in a great mine. Then when I had concluded my yarn, one of my listeners said—

"If you could only write like that, the public would read your stories." So in "The Taming of Cockney Skelly" I have tried to write as if I were one of a bunch of boys yarning around "Camp-Fire."—REGINALD BARKER.

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THIS letter was written to Edgar Young, who found it such good dope that he passed it on to me for Camp-Fire. It seems to clear up some of the seeming contradictions as to crossing the San Blas country. Has any one crossed the line mentioned?

Panama, C. Z.

Have been much interested in the controversies over the San Blas Indians, and especially by the criticisms of W. E. Brandon and your answer. During the last eight years I have spent much time in the Darien district, especially on the Pacific coast, and your definition of the "Darien District" is correct.

NOW as to a definition of San Blas Indian and who they are, will say that all Indians in the district on both the Atlantic and Pacific sides are called San Blas. As a matter of fact, there are several tribes that have become segregated from one main group of the Cuna Indians. The Sambu and Chukoi Indians on the Pacific have the same general characteristics as the Indians in the interior and are undoubtedly from one origin.

They have the same customs and religion and the same peculiar wooden gods, which are cut out of balsa; with the household god, the god of the hunt, the god of the field, and numerous others that are very interesting, among them a most peculiar god; in the case of a man, being a wooden image of a man with an exaggerated male organ attached to the torso by a small dowell of black palm, which is hung above the hammock of the husband who desires a child. The woman has a god of the same sort with an exaggerated female organ carved on the body of the wooden image which she uses for the same purpose. They believe implicitly in the efficacy of their idols, with the convenience of making a new one at any time the old deity fails to work. I have gathered these gods as curiosities and know whereof I speak. On the Atlantic side the Indians have traded and do trade with the boats that ply the coast and have become semi-civilized and, as usual, acquire the vices of civilization rather than the elevating characteristics. Among the pure-blooded Cunas I have never heard of theft and they live clean and are free from disease.

IF YOU will look at a map of Panama and find a place on the Bayano River above El Llano called Cativo, you will find a place marked by them as the limit above which, on the Bayano River, no native or white man is allowed to go. I do not mean by this that no has gone above this point, for I myself have been up in the upper waters of the Mague, but, if the Indians see you, there is no question but that you will be turned back and I have known several to be thus turned back. I did meet Indians and was stopped, but explained I wanted to go to the Mague and was allowed to do so. It happened that I knew these particular Indians, who came down as far as the Mononee to trade.

If you will find a place on the Chucunaque River called Membrillo you will find the forbidden limits on that river. Now if you or any one else will find me a man that has crossed the Isthmus between Cativo and Membrillo I should like to meet him.

There is no objection on the part of the Indians to crossing at the Tuquessa River, a tributary of the Chucunaque, and I have been several days up the Savana River. Have heard many boasts of having been through the Indian country, but investigation has disproved every claim I have met with. Personally, I don't believe it has been done. Recently a British scientist started out from Colon with considerable advertising as to his intention to cross over to the Pacific side through this section. He was gone with his party for about three weeks and returned to the Atlantic side, as the Indians refused to allow him to go through their country.

THEY do have a head man whom they call a king. The present king talks English, and young men are sent out to be educated, as are the Tabasara boys in Chirique.

As to the number of the Indians, it would be a

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rank guess and one man's is as good as the next. I have heard it stated that there are eighteen thousand in the upper reaches of the Bayano River. This may or may not be correct. Ten thousand for all of the Cuna tribes would certainly be a very low estimate, unless you hold strictly to the Indians on the Atlantic coast and eliminate those in the mountains and the valleys of the Bayano and Chucunaque.

This is a very disconnected letter, but as it is written on the spur of the moment as I was reading *Adventure*, you will please excuse everything except the desire to give you my view point and backing on points I am familiar with.—ALBERT T. WILCOX.

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THANKS to all those of you who have contributed to the little fund for a modest memorial tablet to those of our writers' brigade who have passed out over the Long Trail. Harold Lamb, out of town himself, has referred me to a relative who has expert practical knowledge in such matters and I hope soon to confer with him as to design, material and cost.

The matter of cost is secondary. No elaborate tablet is contemplated or desired and if the cost of the design chosen exceeds funds received, this office and the staff will gladly make up the difference. But it is very much to be hoped that the tablet may be made even more representative of our readers and writers at large than it is already. When you write us on other matters won't you, if you have not already contributed, drop into your letter a penny or a postage stamp? There is no need of larger contributions. It is not the size of the contribution that is important.

Some day, when floor-space permits, our magazine hopes to have a headquarters for readers that will be very much worth while, a place of our own where you can come when in New York and find yourself in the real Camp-Fire atmosphere. Back files of the magazine, writing materials, telephone, comfortable chairs, and on the walls and in cases the various relics and specimens readers have sent in from time to time. A kind of central Station in our chain of Stations. This memorial tablet to those whose pens have entertained us in the past will be on the wall there and when you see it you will be glad that you have had your share in raising this token of acknowledgment and comradeship.

SOME of your contributions have run pretty well up into the dollars and these of course are very much appreciated, particularly for the spirit they represent, but what we most want is a similar expression from many hundreds more of you and a penny or a stamp is amply sufficient evidence of your spirit in this Camp-Fire matter. I have a special aversion toward taking up collections and I'm strong for doing things for the living instead of the dead, but this seems a case apart and I have no reluctance in presenting it. It is not only a tribute to dead comrades but it stands as an ever-present proof to the living members of our writers' brigade that, as with no other magazine I know of, they are not just writers but comrades and that we are not going to forget them when their pens move no longer across the blank page creating entertainment for our leisure hours. I know I'd like to have my own name on the tablet when the time comes and I think that our writers, "A. A." editors and members of the office staff will feel the same way. It is always good to know there will be a definite appreciation of work done and friendship given. The tablet isn't just for the dead.

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JUST for the sake of general excitement let's hear Bill Adams, a sailor of those elder days, say his say on this "drunken sailor thing." His talk, however, is chiefly about "sailor," not about "drunken."

That is a deliriously delightful, juicy and refreshing argument your readers seem to be carrying on in Camp-Fire *re* an article known as a "sailor"—some one seems to have mentioned an article called "a drunken sailor." Now, that's what I reckon to be most perfac'ly shocking.

I HAVE no right to butt in in this affair. It isn't my business. I was 'round the Horn under square rig seven times afore I got my growth and I was as quick as any son of a sea-going barnacle afloat at getting to a skys'l yard. I was reasonable handy at picking up a 'gallant, and at the various little items that go to the making of a ripe sailor.

But—I feel I take a liberty to call myself a sailor.

The only time I recall being under the influence of liquor I was riding a bicycle and I found myself compelled to lay it by the roadside and shaking my finger at it to inform the nasty thing that it was too inebriated for any genteel person to care to ride upon.

I have a shocking bad memory.

WELL, sir—now. These here people who are argufying about "drunken sailors"—are any of 'em sailors?

A man may have fought at Jutland and at lots of scraps and may be a first rate honest-to-God seaman and a credit to his glorious country: but *that* doesn't say he is a *sailor*.

Sailors are about as scarce to-day as are Great Auks.

During the war I was at San Diego for a time and

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there one day meeting a gang of as fine-looking young husky gentlemen as any one might ever wish to see, all dressed in the Navy rig, I says,

"Boys," says I, "which side of a topgallant would you clew up first? The weather or the lee?"

Well, sir——

One of 'em says, "What in thunder new cuss-word *is* that, matey?"

Another says, "Aw—c'mon boys—he's a half-witted Irishman."

Another says, "Let's stay an' look at it—it may be a German spy."

I do not want to butt in, being a modest and retiring man with a bald head and no fancy work. But—before argufying as to the thing why not settle the affair by defining the word "sailor" first.

To me a man who follows steam is no sailor. Seaman he may be, but——

I recall a four-poster going to sea from a certain great port one day, in the merry morning, and with every man jack aboard her, in the fo'c's'le that is, drunk as drunk may be. She piled up upon a treacherous rock before sundown of that same Christmas day, and went with all hands save one agile Dutchman who managed to leap to the rock and save his hide. (December 25, 1900.)

Some one, some well-meaning person, wrote to the papers saying what a shame it was how ships were allowed to go to sea with all hands and the cook stewed up—and the owners sued the paper for libel and *won their case.*

The *sailor,* the old-style man, the fellow who took the flying *John Bertram,* with her big white bellying skysails set, across to Liverpool, reeling off her 380 knots a day *under sail;* the fellows who came round stiff with *Flying Cloud,* and *Red Jacket,* and *Guiding Star,* and *Comet,* and *Dancing Wave,* and many another ship of the good old sailing days,—they were a drunken lot; but they were *sailors.*

*Show us a better breed of men if you can.*

Where the nowadays so-called sailor sips his sweet prohibition sugared water, and washes his lily hands in scented soap, the other poor devil was fed on rot-gut liquor by the avaricious boarding-master and the crimp; and the owners *didn't see. The nation didn't care. No one gave a tin* ——.

They fed them on rotten harness-cask horse, and weevily hardtack.

Oh, well——

"Willie, pass me the scented soap and let's go ashore and have a nice ice-cream sody, eh? Wot say?"

A *sailor* who is proud of his old pals.—Bill Adams.

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IN CONNECTION with his serial story beginning in this issue, something from Hugh Pendexter:

Norway, Maine.

Fifty million dollars' worth of mining-property was in litigation in Nevada in 1863, two years after the date of my story. One-fifth of the product of the Comstock lode was used up in lawsuits from 1860 to 1865. Wm. M. Stewart estimated that the cost of litigation up to 1866 was ten million dollars. The Chollar and Potosi companies spent $1,300,000, and then composed their legal differences by uniting as the Chollar-Potosi. Fourteen of the big mining companies were plaintiffs in 168 actions and were defendants in 77.

I HAVE abstained from mentioning the Grosch brothers, discoverers of the Comstock, or Henry T. P. Comstock, a Gold Cañon miner, who happened to be in position to secure possession of the Groschs' papers after the death of the brothers, as much has been written about the weird pranks fate played on these early discoverers. Comstock left his name to the immensely rich lode, left Nevada in '62 and committed suicide by shooting in the Fall of 1870, after returning from the Big Horn expedition. James Fennimore, commonly called "old Virginia," came into the country as one of Reese's teamsters in 1851 and was associated with Comstock for a brief time after the lode was discovered. He gave the lasting name to Virginia City, which was first known as "Ophir," after the mine of that name; and later named Silver City by Comstock. Fennimore was killed by being thrown from a horse in the Summer of 1861, two months before the time my story opens.

BILL MAYFIELD'S life in Carson Valley and his finish adhere to facts, including the homicide which caused him to flee the territory, with the one exception of the man I have for his slayer. Just who killed Mayfield I do not know. Perhaps some old-timer does. I made his finish convenience fiction needs. John Blackburn, the deputy marshal, was an excellent type of a fearless, honest man, doing his duty against odds. His killing of one of Mayfield's men several years before my story opens won for him Mayfield's undying hatred.

Miss H. K. Clapp, who conducted the Sierra Seminary in Carson City, taught school in Ypsilanti, Mich., prior to going to the territory. She was assisted in her school by Mrs. E. G. Cutler and Miss E. C. Babcock.

I ORIGINALLY intended to have Mrs. Lemuel S. Bowers ("Sandy" Bowers) and possibly her husband, figure in the story. Mrs. Bowers, born in the Highlands of Scotland, came to Carson Valley in '55 with Orson Hyde's company from Salt Lake City. On coming to America she married, at the age of fifteen, Stephen Hunter and with him went to Salt Lake. When he smiled on polygamy she left him and later married Alexander Cowan. When Orson Hyde and his followers were called back to Salt Lake to help fight Johnston's army Mrs. Bowers (she married Sandy in '58) refused to return. Sandy was an illiterate, kind-hearted Irishman, a miner. He died in '68, four years after the European tour, leaving an estate of more than six hundred thousand dollars, and this despite their foolish and extravagant expenditures. The superintendent of a mine and mill soon arranged it so Mrs. Bowers was reduced to poverty. Her home, costing more than four hundred thousand dollars, became a hotel and Mrs. Bowers supported herself in her last years by telling fortunes.

NEAR Silver City a Scotch miner excavated several rooms in an abandoned tunnel. He possessed an excellent library and often held religious services in his cave-home. I mention this as some of my readers might scout the idea of Kane and Thomas having such an abode. It was believed by many that cities of ancient Cibola were buried beneath the sands some twenty miles south of Reese Valley. It has been claimed that the Morgan expedition found the ruins of an ancient city,

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consisting of buildings, well built even according to what moderns consider good masonry, and with streets regularly laid out.

As to Sorry Kane's fear of the danger ever dogging him, there was Harry Youngblood, one of the pioneers of the Arkansas Valley, who went under an assumed name because of his alleged connection with the same tragedy which I have Kane figure in. Youngblood spent most of his time in Colorado and not Nevada, however.

FOR introducing the song "Lorena" I may be shot in the heel. I have endeavored to find the publication date of this song and to determine the time of its first appeal to favor. From what I have been able to ascertain I feel warranted in believing it was sung at the outbreak of the Civil War and even considerably earlier. If I have erred in this I will be set right very promptly, for "Lorena" was the most popular sentimental song of its time and was sung throughout the Southland. If I be guilty, Southern men, shoot!

The elevated valley which figures for a chapter or so in the story was later the mineral district of Palmyra. Here in 1863-4 were the mining towns of Como and Palmyra. The first grew rapidly and was the county seat of Lyon County. It had its quartz-mill and its newspaper, the *Como Sentinel*, first issued April 16, 1864; discontinued in July of the same year. It was a weekly, republican in politics. Its founders were H. L. Weston and T. W. Abraham. The town was abandoned with the exception of one citizen, G. W. Walton, who lived alone among the streets of empty houses, and who was burned to death in his lonely home on Nov. 22, 1873.

Pap Jaimson's strike near Jacob's overland station on Reese River would coincide with the ledge discovered by William M. Talcott, a pony-express rider, in Pony Cañon, May 2 1862. He named the mine "Pony Ledge."

Many pioneer names I have refrained from mentioning because the frequency with which they have appeared in history and fact-articles would make them "old stuff" in a fiction story of adventure. Senator William M. Stewart was one of the best known men in the territory even as early as '61, and my brief mention of him is solely to convenience my plot.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

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ALL of our writers' brigade were asked whether they'd like to receive criticisms, especially unfavorable criticisms, direct from readers. As you can see from the following list, the brigade responded strongly. They welcome the chance to get from the readers themselves the direct reactions to their stories. As some of you know, we generally forward adverse criticisms to authors when readers write to us and we keep a careful record of all criticisms and comments that come in from readers. The new plan, however, will doubtless bring out still further expressions of opinion and our writers welcome the idea.

That doesn't mean, though, that they can enter into extensive correspondence with all who write to them. If it meant only a few people to write to, I'm pretty sure, from experience, that any of our writers would be glad to write and write fully. But even now I know that some of our writers are badly worried because they don't want to leave any letters unanswered yet can not possibly afford to take the hours per day this would require. Believe me, when a man makes his living with his pen he doesn't want to—and ought not to—give much of his rest and recreation time to more pen (or typewriter) work. Nor, if he is in other business and does his writing on the side, can he spare much of his on-the-side time for letter-writing.

So write to them about their stories whenever you have anything to say, good or bad. But, if it's bad, say it like a man instead of like a rotter or a shrewish old woman. That kind of stuff is silly; ninety-nine per cent. of you don't do it and the other one per cent. ought to realize that kind of thing makes a fool of themselves instead of the other fellow. I nearly did it myself the other day, for it's a natural impulse to bawl out the other fellow. A minister has put me on his mailing list for the bulletin of a "civic reform league" whose idea of "civic" is no broader than a wild-eyed crusade against rum, cigarets, gambling at street carnivals, etc. Civic my eye! No wonder our politics are rotten when all "civic" means to our "spiritual leaders" is forgetting everything else in a democracy except some particular evils they don't happen to be addicted to themselves.

IT ALWAYS irritates me, too, when a minister tries to improve on Christ. Even if you don't believe in Christ you have to admit the broadness of His vision and the depth of His understanding as well as the highness of His purpose. But some of the ministers, *they* don't have to, or at least they don't. On the contrary, they feel their own little point of view is decidedly better and proceed to hand it out to the rest of us. Christ went to the heart of things, to the fundamentals, and put His emphasis on the Golden Rule. Not so these birds with the revising and improving tendency. The Golden Rule is too large a subject for them; they prefer to center on some minor point—perhaps on one with more fireworks and notoriety attached to it. They understand real Christianity to about the pitiful degree

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they understand "civic." Oh, yes, I know this is an age of specialization, but a minister's job is to specialize on Christianity and the heart of Christianity comes pretty close to being the Golden Rule. Certainly the heart of Christanity is not the suppression of drink, cigarets and gambling at street carnivals. Perhaps some of the many ministers who do have vision and understanding will tell us just what relative importance Christ attached to evils of the type of drink, cigarets, etc.

Anyhow, if I were running the Liquor League I'd try to get that minister to accept a few hundred thousand dollars so that his bulletin could have wider circulation. No, not subsidize him; just let him run it his own way. I voted for Prohibition, but every time I read that bulletin I'm filled with a desire to rush out, buy three or four stills and begin selling bootleg booze to old women and little children.

Yes, I wrote him a letter, a very unpleasant one, but I did have sense enough to burn it up instead of sending it.

Look where I've wandered! That's always the way with drink—or Prohibition—once it gets started you never can tell where it's going to end up.

YES, when you have a real comment to make, write to the writers in the following list, just remembering that yours is very likely not the only letter he has to answer. And above all, don't let writing to our writers stop you from writing to the magazine itself. Register all your kicks and praises here with the editors. We're the fellows who have the job of trying to shape the magazine in accordance with your expressed kicks and praises; if we don't get 'em, we can't shape it to suit you. It's asking a good deal of a writer to expect him to send the editors letters tending to prove that the editors better go slowly on buying any more of his stories. Some of our writers are just good enough sports to do that, but it's asking a lot of a man, asking a lot. And anyhow, while we editors shall always be glad to see favorable or unfavorable letters received by our writers, we'll not enter these comments in our records. So if your object is merely to have more of a writer's stories, or to have no more, or to suggest specific changes in his work, write to the magazine itself, whether you write to the author or not.

Here's the list. Those giving no address can be reached in care of the magazine:

Adams, Bill, 496 Bellah Ave., Lindsay, Cal.; Anderson, Paul L., 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.; Baker, Ben F.; Bailey, H. C.; Barker, Lewis Appleton, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.; Barnett, Thomas F., 106 E. 5th St., Dallas, Texas; Beadle, Charles; Beames, John; Bennett, Rolf, Pendervis, St. Ives, Cornwall, England; Birney, H. H., Jr., 4051 Baring St., Phila., Pa.; Bishop, Farnham, 2740 Garber St., Berkeley, Cal.; Bonter, Max; Brininstool, E. A., 1428 Norton Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.; Buckley, F. R.; Buranelli, Prosper, Sunday Room, New York *World*, New York, N. Y.; Copeland, Henry C., 106 Winch Bldg., Vancouver, B. C., Canada; Connor, Buck, Box 202, Hollywood, Cal.; Catton, Geo. L.; Deever, Brian; Dunn, J. Allan; Dyer, Walter A., Rock Walls Farm, Amherst, Mass.; Fischer, Chas. V.; Foster, E. O.; Garstin, Crosbie; Gaunt, Mary; Gilbert, Kenneth; Harriman, E. E.; Harris, Arthur M., Supreme Court, Olympia, Wash.; Holt, Geo. E.; Horn, Roy de S.; Horton, Robert J.; Hough, Clyde B.; Howell, Kenneth, care of K. C. Thomas, Asbury Park, N. J.; Hull, Alexander, 415 N. Meridian St., Newberg, Oregon; Huston, Frank, 528 14th St., San Diego, Cal.; Jackson, Frederick J., The Press Club, San Francisco, Cal.; Johns, Bruce; Joseph, John, Weiser, Idaho; Kilpatrick, Lewis H., 80 N. Sycamore St., Mt. Sterling, Ky.; Kohler, Lloyd A., 131 E. Holmes St., Junction City, Kansas; LeMay, Alan B., 191 Grand Ave., Aurora, Ill.; Lowdermilk, Romaine H., Wickenburg, Arizona; Lyle, Eugene P. Jr., 4027 Third St., San Diego, Cal.; Malone, Thomas J., 17 Handicraft Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn.; Manley, Wm. Ford; Marsden, W. R.; Moore, Frederick, 106 West 55th St., N. Y.; McMorrow, Thos., 271 W. 125th St., New York; Mundy, Talbot; Newsom, J. D.; Pendexter, Hugh, Norway, Me.; Pierce, Frank Richardson, 4500 Linden Ave., Seattle, Wash.; Robertson, Frank C.; Sabalala, Santie, 396 Adelphi St., Brooklyn, N. Y.; Sabatini, Rafael; Saxby, Chester L.; Scarry, John Joseph; Schnetzler, Stanley S.; Scobee, Barry; Scott, Kingsbury, care of *The Tribune*, Grand Haven, Mich.; Scott, R. T. M.; Shaw, Frank H.; Smith, A. D. H.; Smith, Walton Hall, 204 Commerce Building, Kansas City, Mo.; Solomons, T. S., 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Cal.; Spears, R. S., Little Falls, N. Y.; Springer, Norman, 959 Vallejo St., San Francisco, Cal.; Stolper, B. J.; Tuttle, W. C., 6046 Carlos Ave., Hollywood, Cal.; Von Schrader, Atreus; Wall, R. N., care of Oliver Chilled Plow Works, Richmond, Va.; Watkins, Wilbur, Gen. Del., Los Angeles, Cal.; Webster, F. A. M.; Wells, G. A.; Young, Edgar.

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In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free identification card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

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# Ask Adventure

**A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.**

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service (except our assaying and oil services) free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

**1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters**
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Bigelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

**2. ★ The Sea Part 2 British Waters**
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

**3. ★ Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits**
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section*).

**4. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico and Virgin Group**
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, 90 South Orchard St., San José, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

**5. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa**
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

**6. South Sea Islands Part 2**
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

**7. ★ Australia and Tasmania**
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

**8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java**
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

**9. New Guinea**
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

**10. Philippine Islands**
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

**11. Hawaiian Islands and China**
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

**12. Japan**
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

**13. Asia, Southern**
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*



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**14. Africa Part 1 Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria**
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

**15. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo**
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

**16. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand**
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

**17. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East**
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**18. Africa Part 5 Morocco**
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

**19. Africa Part 6 Tripoli**
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

**20. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States**
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**21. Turkey and Asia Minor**
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

**22. Balkans, except Albania**
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

**23. Albania**
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

**24. Scandinavia**
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

**25. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland**
FRED F. FLEISCHER, Room 308, 26 Broadway, New York. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

**26. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile**
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

**27. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina**
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

**28. Central America**
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, 90 So. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

**29. Mexico Part 1 Northern**
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

**30. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California**
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Box 281, San Luis Obispo, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

**31. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec**
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**32. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario**
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**33. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario**
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**34. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District**
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

**35. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta**
ED. L. CARSON, Mount Vernon, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

**36. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin**
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**37. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec**
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**38. Alaska**
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

**39. Baffinland and Greenland**
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

**40. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Parts of Utah and Ariz.**
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Except portions mentioned below. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

**41. Western U. S. Part 2 Parts of Utah and Ariz.**
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Cliff Dwellings, Two Grey Peaks, the Carrizo Mts., Cañon De Chelley, Chin Lee Wash, the Moonlight Country, the Blue Mts. (Utah), Navaho Indian Reservation in general. Pack trips, prospecting, hunting, camping, trapping and mining; habits, etc., of Navaho Indians.

**42. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.**
FRANK MIDDLETON, 504 So. 2d. St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

**43. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains**
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

**44. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country**
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

**45. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.**
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

**46. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.**
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

**47. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.**
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

**48. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan**
J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

**49. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River**
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

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**50. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks**
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

**51. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers**
HOWARD A. SHANNON, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

**52. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.**
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

**53. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Maine**
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

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H. C. WIRE, Chino, Calif. If all conditions are complied with, a *general estimate* as to composition and commercial value will be given from ore specimens submitted. Specimens half the size of a man's fist, in canvas bag, cigar-box or other strong wrapping; preferably by parcel post; *always marked with sender's name and address.* Separate letter telling general nature of locality, mass of rocks where found and of neighboring rocks; what local mining activities; *what particular mineral is sought in sample;* nothing that gives away exact location. Samples (usually destroyed in analysis) will not be returned. Charge: $1 per sample.

*Oil.* A rough general opinion given on oil indications. Give general description of lay of land as to hills, exposed rock-beds, kind of rock. (Can help also by referring inquirer to U. S. Geol. Survey bulletins that may bear on locality.) No questions as to stocks, companies or investments answered. Charge: 50 cents per locality.

No responsibility assumed by either the magazine or me beyond honesty and sincere endeavor. Name and address of sender will not even be passed on to the magazine in case inquiry and answer are sent it for publication.

## OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

## WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

**A.—All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

**B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

**C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

## FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

**Salt and Fresh Water Fishing**

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

## MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

## STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

### Conditions for the Prospector in C. A.

NICARAGUA by all means nowadays, is Mr. Emerson's verdict:

*Question:*—"I am coming to you again for more information. Would not bother you were it not for the fact that I consider you an authority on Central America and the most reliable source of information that I know of. So here goes, hoping you don't mind.

I and a friend of mine, an old, experienced prospector and miner, want to go prospecting in Spanish Honduras and possibly Nicaragua with intention also of buying some land in the highlands and make our homes there. Do you think this plan good, and if so how much money would you think necessary—minimum—to make the trip and get us started?

Have heard rumors to the effect that all the mining country is monopolized by big companies. Is there any truth in this?

Which part of the country would you advise us to strike for? We are looking not only for gold but also good climate and good land.

Would it be all right to start in December?

Can we buy our outfit down there, or had we better equip in this country?

What kind of guns are the most practical?

Would we experience any difficulty in passing guns and ammunition through the customs?

How are the mining laws in Honduras? What are the taxes and first cost in taking up a mine?

Do you consider Honduras the one best bet?

I have lived in Mexico a number of years, so I speak, read and write Spanish fluently. Am also a member of the Camp-Fire and read *Adventure* and admire it very much.

Please let me hear from you, and pardon me for again seeking your assistance. The first "welcome nugget" I find I will send you as a token of my appreciation."—A. T. LOFBERG, Big Creek, Calif.

*Answer*, by Mr. Emerson:—I think Nicaragua would be the best all-around bet for your purpose. Honduras and some of the other C. A. republics

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are rather finicky and leary of Americans just at present. Nicaragua has refused to join their combination due to the fact that she is almost purely under American jurisdiction.

The railroads and steamer lines of the country are under American management. The custom-houses and banks are run by gringoes. American marines have been guarding the peace of Managua for many years. The Government is stable, Americans fairly popular, and the chances of a man not being cheated out of his mine or land are good. *¿Sabe Ud?* Honduras has got some wonderful country in the highlands, but Nicaragua has got just the same sort in the highlands. And the native people of Nicaragua are one hundred per cent. better people than Honduranians, who are pretty well hit with the tar-brush and are more or less undependable.

Nicaragua has better transportation. They have boats on the lake and boats running down the San Juan to the Atlantic, and a railroad running from Corinto up to the Gran Lago. They also have many cart roads in the Pacific half. At the best, transportation is pretty bum in Nicaragua. I was one of the officials of the railroad a few years ago and know this. But the transportation of Honduras is super-bum, rotten, *non est* for the most part.

And in Nicaragua the two halves of the republic are so well isolated that they breed different sorts of people in the two halves of the country. The San Juan, the Gran Lago, the *ferrocarril* between Corinto and Granada, those are the traffic lanes. The best part of the country is without transportation, other than shanks' mare and canoes. When I say the *best*, I mean the mountain country in the western half of the central portion, or just west of the tops of the mountains. This is the ideal country for coffee, cattle, American grain, fruit, etc.

There is not too much rain west of the mountains, but there is too much east of them and down at the Atlantic coast too —— much. It ranges from 120 inches at the extreme Atlantic coast to about 70 or 80 on the west side. There is a terrible lot of dust in Managua when it is in the middle of the dry season. And they don't know what dust is in Greytown, on the other side.

The best mining country, for placer, seems to be on the headwaters of the rivers running east to the Atlantic. Several small mining companies exist along the heads of the streams.

The best *ore* mines have been located in the Pacific half near the railroads. Several of these mines are operated by English and Australians at the present time. What prospecting that has been done has been done in a most primitive way, and most of the ore mines were operated by the Spaniards and have been reopened. Several German outfits are operating at the headquarters of the Pis-pis and Prinzapolka Rivers. All of these companies have concessions of greater or less extent, I suppose.

You can buy almost anything you would need down there with the exception of prospecting-tools, such as gold-pan, mercury, etc. It is better to take them from here. Khaki clothes are good and can be bought either there or here.

The attached monograph gives something concerning climate.

Take a .30-30 carbine or rifle, .38 Spl. S. & W. or Colt's revolver, .22 (long) single-shot. A cheap muzzle-loading shotgun is also a good thing to pack along. You will find Americans in almost all of the custom-houses.

Write Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Latin-American Division, Washington, D. C., for data covering mines and mining of Nicaragua and Honduras.

I have a friend named Jimmy Gaylord at Masaya, Nicaragua, who will do all he can to help you make the start into the hills. He is chief dispatcher for the R. R. I think you will find Nicaragua better for your purpose than Honduras.

If old man D. Mansfield is around Managua he will also do what he can. He is a real old adventurer, raised in Bryan's home town in Nebraska, and has several hundred thousand acres of land in Nicaragua. You might get into some sort of a dicker and help him develop what he has.

***The full statement of sections in this department, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.***

### The Allagash Canoe Trip

TAKE it in September, and you won't have to scratch yourself:

*Question:*—"Could you inform me on the following and oblige:

The best place to start on the Allagash canoe-trip.

Is September a good time to go?

Probable cost for two men, the trip to last four weeks, counting grub and railroad fare from Fort Kent to Bangor.

Could we buy a canoe cheaper in Bangor or Greenville Jct. or Boston?

What kind of a canoe would you advise? How long? Would you advise buying a second-hand one?

How long would we have to depend on ourselves for getting provisions? Are there any camps along the way? How far apart? What stuff would they have in the line of provisions?

What caliber rifle would you advise me to take? Where can we get a fishing license?

We intend to take the St. Johns canoe-trip also. Please give me the dope regarding length, quantity of grub necessary for traversing the whole distance, camps.

I understand the St. Johns is a rather hard river to navigate in a canoe for those who have had little experience. Is that true?

Guides are not a necessary item, are they? Would you advise me to make the Allagash or St. Johns trip alone? What are the best clothes to wear? I am used to Winter work in the North but have not been there in the Summer.

I have asked a multitude of questions and will certainly appreciate your answers."—RALPH W. PIERSON, New Haven, Conn.

*Answer*, by Dr. Hathorne:—Most of the sports making the Allagash trip start from Northeast Carry, at the head of Moosehead Lake. Leaving the train at Kineo Station, on the lake, the steamer drops you at the carry, a 20-mile sail. It is a two-mile carry from here to the west branch of the Penobscot, where the trip begins. September would be a fine month to make the trip, as there are no insect pests then to bother.

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An approximate cost of the trip this year would be something like the following: Guide 30 days, not less than $90; guide's expenses, say for board and other incidentals, $50; supplies for two, $50; carrying canoe and outfit, $15; hotel expenses and fares, Fort Kent to Bangor, $25.

Your guide will furnish canoe and camping-equipment, although it is well to take your own blankets. Canoes may be bought for from $40 to $60. Probably you could get these at the starting-point and sell them at end of trip for a fair price. I would advise either an Oldtown or White, guide's model, 19 feet. A good second-hand canoe is all right if in good shape.

There are quite a few places where necessary supplies may be obtained, but it is well to take food to suit your individual tastes, like dried fruit, jams, sirup, dehydrated vegetables, etc.

You would have no use for a rifle in the month of September, as it is closed time on all game with the exception of birds, and you would be required to take out a non-resident hunting license at a cost of $15 in order to carry a gun.

Fishing licenses may be obtained at N. E. Carry. The St. Johns trip is a much longer and harder trip than the Allagash, and does not compare with it for beauty.

In making either trip it would be necessary to employ a guide as the game laws state, "All non-residents when camping and building fires on *wild lands* of the State, when engaged in *fishing or hunting*, must be in charge of a registered guide." Almost any good strong clothing with thin woolen underwear and wool hose is suitable for the trip, although in September the nights are likely to be cool.

Why not send to Mr. Geo. M. Houghton, Traffic Manager, B. & A. R. R., for a copy of the book "In the Maine Woods." Enclose 10c. It will give you a lot of good dope on both the above trips, also much other valuable information for the woods tourist. I will be glad to make arrangements for you for either trip should you decide to come to Maine.

***If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.***

### Chances for the Mining Engineer

A BIRD'S-EYE view of opportunities open to American members of the profession the world over:

*Question:*—"I believe you can furnish me with very extensive information concerning the mining industry in the Far East.

Prepared for the profession of mining at Harvard, I have been engaged in that business in the West for the past twenty years, but believe there are better opportunities in Eastern countries than here; but exact information I find hard to obtain.

If you can furnish me with the names of some mining companies to whom I may apply for an opening I shall appreciate it very much."—B. A. Tower, Butte, Mont.

*Answer*, by Mr. Binda:—Having myself studied mining at Harvard, I think I can give you an answer to your inquiry. Though not entirely satisfactory, possibly, you will know that it comes from one that understands the subject.

You are probably aware that China offers the greatest possibilities to the mining engineer. The potentialities of mining in China are tremendous, although on account of the political condition prevailing there the development has been slow and probably will continue so for some time. I think this is the country for the pioneer, the man willing to go out there and take chances.

However, from the information which I have available, I know of no company sending men out there at the present time, or who would be willing to send for men to go out there from the United States. The only possible way to obtain the right kind of a situation would be for you to take a chance and visit the country. You might also write to the different mining concerns established there. I have not the names of these, but I think that you can find them in a book (two volumes) issued by the Department of Commerce, written by Julian Arnold called "Hand-Book of China." This book can be obtained from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. at a very low price—I think for about 50c. I would advise you to obtain this book, as it contains a great deal of interesting information, besides giving a good outline on the mining situation in China.

There is a little work going on in the Straits Settlement mines, but frankly I do not think you would have a chance there. The labor is native, and the officials are mostly Europeans who will work for a smaller salary than you would find necessary and than you could obtain in this country.

In Australia the mining industry offers no opportunity for a newcomer. South Africa offers very good opportunities, especially for Americans. The American mining engineer is appreciated in this part of the world, and under normal conditions should have little difficulty in obtaining a lucrative appointment.

Mining, as you know, is international. By that I mean that a change of conditions in one part of the world affects the mining industry in all other sections. That is, if there is a depression in the United States in the mining industry you may rest assured that the same condition will exist in South Africa, or South America. The mining industry at present is experiencing a universal depression; but frankly I believe that it has reached the bottom and is now on the upward trend, so that we may hope for better conditions soon throughout the world.

I am enclosing a pamphlet which I prepared last year on conditions in South Africa and which might be interesting to you, especially a few paragraphs on mining.

Personally I am a firm believe in South Africa and central South Africa as a tremendous field for future development; a field wherein Americans would have the opportunities similar to those which were available to the first settlers in our own West.

South American countries, however, are better known to our American mining interests than is any other part of the world, and you would find it more easy to obtain a chance to go to these countries, provided conditions improve, than elsewhere.

On my last visit to Colombia I was tremendously impressed by the mining possibilities of this State, and also of the district bordering on the republic of Venezuela; herein is a great field for our companies. It is near to home and easily reached by the various steamship lines.

When I left the university I went to Asia Minor

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with the idea of making a study of mining conditions in that part of the world. I have always regretted, however, that luck did not take me to Colombia or Venezuela. If you can stand the climate—and I believe you can, or you would be a poor mining engineer—this is the place for you to go if you do not want to go far from the United States. I think the Guggenheim interests (the American Smelting and Refining Co.) are interested in this part of the world, and you can find out from them just what the opportunities of your obtaining employment are. Also you can readily find out in your mining journal the name of companies operating in this district.

I understand also that there is a serious movement on foot to send several hundred American mining men to Russia to work some of the closed-down mines in the Ural Mountains. This movement, however, is under the auspices of the I. W. W. in this country. I do not know enough of the details to give you any advice on it.

You have had special training, and I have no doubt that if you took the chance of going to China, South Africa or the northern part of South America, you would have no difficulty in obtaining employment. Mining companies do not as a rule like to send out men from this country, because they can easily pick up enough men for their purpose right on the ground.

I hope that the above will be of some assistance to you and that you will write me for any further information you may need.

***"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop. Exception: Our assaying and oil services.***

### Newport News to Philadelphia by Canoe

HOW to shift ballast in a stiff breeze; and how to land through the surf:

*Question:*—"I thought I would take advantage of your kind offer to furnish information regarding small-boat sailing.

My cousin and myself are going to try to sail an eighteen-foot canoe down to Newport News, Va., and back to Philadelphia some time this Summer. The information we want, sir, is: How and what sort of a sail should we rig, ballasting, leeboards, and how to land a canoe through the surf without upsetting. We expect to make the trip in at the most three weeks, camping on the beach every night.

The course we have planned is down the Delaware, through the District of Columbia Canal, then on down the west side of Chesapeake Bay. Any information you could give us regarding tides, etc., we would really appreciate."—ROBERT CHIVAS, Philadelphia, Pa.

*Answer*, by Mr. B. Brown:—For a canoe of that length two leg-o'-mutton sails would answer very well; or for a single sail, either a spritsail or a lateen sail. The latter, with very short mast, is sometimes used in racing-canoes. In canoe-sailing as a rule no ballast is used, the crew acting as live ballast and shifting for that purpose. In racing quite often a sliding seat is fixed 'thwartships, extending over the side; and the helmsman sometimes slides clear of the canoe to keep her steady under a heavy weight of wind.

Landing through the surf is a simple matter to describe, but it takes an expert to do it. Practically with a double-ender, like a canoe or a whaleboat, you approach the shore bow on, wait for the big wave, ride it in, balanced on the top, and when it breaks, all hands jump overboard and run the boat up as high as possible before the next wave overtakes her. There is no reason for landing through surf anywhere on Chesapeake Bay, however, for in decent weather there would be practically no surf anywhere, and in bad weather there are plenty of ports to make. You had better get "Pocket Course Book for Chesapeake Bay and Tributaries," which can be had from the Rudder Publishing Co., 9 Murray St., New York.

### How to Practise Bait and Fly Casting

THESE hints were written out for the benefit of a young lady; but men can learn a lot from them too:

*Question:*—"I have had no experience in outdoor life, but the lure of Nature is calling. We live about forty miles from a creek where there are a few bass. Do you think it possible for a young lady to learn fly-fishing and bait-casting? I am not very strong, and my family consequently advises my taking plenty of outdoor exercise to regain strength.

I would appreciate your advice and a few hints for an amateur."—KATHERINE SAWYER, Milledgeville, Ga.

*Answer*, by Mr. Thompson:—Taking up either bait or fly casting will give you a great deal of pleasure as well as help you get strong. You can learn as quickly as a man.

Get a man's bass rod for fly rod, 9 or 9½ feet long, about 5 ounce. If it's pretty stiff use an E line or if a trifle whippy a D. Get out on lawn and cast, starting by gradually whipping out what line you can and stripping from the reel more as you can use it with your left; or leave what slack line you can't handle at your feet. Don't put any weight on line. Hold rod very close to body; whip forward short line at first; after you have taken the little slack there is with your left make your pick-up by a quick lift. Do not let tip of rod go back of your shoulder at the greatest angle more than 10 or 15 degrees.

You must give the line some time to straighten out back of you. As soon as you feel the pull, whip it forward. In a short while you will have it O.K.

Then you can put on your leader and try with flies. But when casting a fly, just before the fly lights, give a little upward tilt to rod and the leader will straighten out nicely.

For bait-casting the rod is short—from 4½ to 6½ feet. My preference is for 6 feet. Use good multiplying reel—it pays to get the best—and a soft braided silk line. Reel in bait until about 6 inches from tip; hold thumb on reel; whip just as you would fling a mud ball, but do not take thumb entirely off the reel; let it purr along it as the line runs out and this will prevent backlashing. When the bait is about two or three feet over place at which you aimed, press your thumb hard. You will develop accuracy quickly.

Use overhand cast in open water, and when you want to get under limbs use side casts. You will

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get on nicely; but learn from the start to thumb the reel, and remember this: It must be thumbed always unless you use one of the modern antibacklash reels. Then they do the work for you.

### Precious Stones of Mexico

CHATOYANT means possessing a changeable luster, like a cat's eye in the dark:

*Question:*—"I am very much interested in the various gems and stones produced in the republic of Mexico and would appreciate all the information you can give me, as to where found, etc., etc.

I enclose stamps for answer."—FRED A. OFFENBACH, Des Moines, Ia.

*Answer*, by Mr. Mahaffey:—Although Mexico is one of the richest mining countries in the world, and contains practically every mineral substance known, few semi-precious and precious stones have been found, and the known deposits have not been properly developed. Diamonds have been found in the State of Guerrero, but in rare instances; and efforts to locate the place from where they came proved useless. Guerrero, however, is one of the best known States of Mexico, and many explorers have the firm belief that diamond deposits exist somewhere in the mountains of that State.

The most abundant stone in Mexico is the opal; and while so far only one American concern has undertaken to work these deposits they will eventually prove to be a very important industry.

Opal mines are usually very deep. They are worked in a very crude and primitive manner. The matrix is drilled out and brought to the surface in rawhide sacks on the backs of Indian laborers, then broken into small pieces with hammers and sent to the cutters, who grind the stones on abrasive wheels of varying degrees of fineness. When a rich vein is found and opened near the surface it presents an unusually beautiful spectacle, the rock glistening with myriad rays of colored light.

The first layer or vein is usually about five feet thick, and is generally followed by a layer of earth of about the same thickness, which in turn covers another vein of opal-bearing rock. This stratification often continues to a great depth. The matrix is extremely hard, and as dynamite is often used to break it many fine stones are ruined by the blasts. The Queretaro opal district is so rich in opal-bearing rock that traces of these stones can be seen in the stone used thereabouts for building purposes. Certain of the opals found in Mexico vary in price from five cents to a thousand pesos each. The principal kinds of opal are as follows:

The Fire Opal, the finest opal of commerce, usually taken from a grayish-red matrix. It is frequently called the precious opal on account of the variety and beauty of its coloring. The best fire opals are the most resplendent of all the different kinds of opals; and as they are almost as hard as the finest Hungarian stones they are valuable and rare.

The Harlequin Opal, remarkable for an almost infinite variety of colors and color combinations, from which it takes its name. They are usually distinguished by patches of brilliant and variegated tints, which change their position and character as the stone is moved. Some show large blotches of color which shift with the moving of the stone, but these seldom show more than two colors at the same time, one being more pronounced than the other. Usually the colors are broken up into small speckled lights which play with flashes of carmine and a dark violet blue—the latter considered as a rare and desirable color.

Others show a reflection of emerald and green lights combined with a very fine dark ultramarine blue. These colors are produced by structural peculiarities, which diffract in varying degrees the light rays entering the stone and give a prismatic play of colors, as in the rainbow, and are not due to the chemical constituents, as is commonly believed. The colors are best brought out on a black background; hence dealers usually show them on a black paper. When thus fixed they are called "black opals."

The beautiful Cloudy Opal is found in the whitish porphyries; being very common in Mexico, they are not sought for as much as the fire opals.

The Cat's Eye Opal—which exhibits a chatoyant line over the center of the dome, similar to the cat's eye, and which is usually of a bright green color—is the rarest form of opal.

The Turquoise was mined in Mexico long before the conquest. The Mexican turquoise is as fine as the far-famed products of the Nishapur and the Korassan mines and is celebrated for its beautiful sky-blue color.

At present the world's supply of turquoise is drawn from New Mexico and Mexico. In Mexico it is found only in compact form in irregular veins within the matrix. It is very attractive, and certain pieces give material for very attractive ornaments. The whole mass usually runs in blue veins through masses of rocks of a reddish color, with now and then concretions of turquoise called nuggets, which afford stones of value.

The proper color of turquoise is sky blue inclining slightly to green, but much of it has greenish-blue and green tints. The inferior stones are of a pale muddy yellowish green. The blue tint, so much prized, is often readily altered to green, both naturally from exposure, or when worn, by contact with fatty acids, perspiration, soaps or perfumes. The green varieties of turquoise resemble jade, but may be distinguished from it readily in several ways.

Malachite is also abundant in Mexico. The color is usually a brilliant green, lighter and darker banded and clouded in different shades.

Onyx, a chalcedony or chalcedonic quartz consisting of parallel layers (usually curvilinear) of different shades of color, is mined in many parts of Mexico. The most valuable deposits of onyx are in the States of Puebla and Oaxaca and the Territory of Lower California. In Puebla it is called "Puebla marble." The Mexican onyx is actually an aragonite and is softer than the real onyx.

The Mexican onyx is used extensively in the jeweler's trade in the manufacture of small souvenirs and in the interior decoration of churches and buildings. The iron deposits which give the color to the onyx are somewhat affected by changes in temperature. The variety without stripes is harder but is not as handsome as the striped stone. Some of it is translucent and is used instead of window glass. Mexican onyx was introduced into the American market only in recent years, and has very good prospects.

Other stones found in Mexico are rock crystal, topaz, garnets, agates, amethysts and emeralds.

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### Some Big-Game Country!

THE way Brother Carson tells it, it sounds like seventy-five years ago:

*Question:*—"I would be pleased to receive at the earliest possible date what information you can give me, or where I can obtain such information, pertaining to the big-game laws and best localities for moose and bear hunting.

Also any information you can give me as to reliable guides, and where located."—J. C. NICHOLS, Chicago.

*Answer*, by Mr. Carson:—If you are looking for a real game country I would advise taking a trip up the Stikine River to Telegraph Creek, which will land you in the heart of one of the best game countries in America, bar none.

To reach it come to Vancouver, take a steamer to Fort Wrangel, Alaska, (south end on coast) and from there the Barrington boats will take you up the river to Telegraph Creek. This trip alone is well worth the taking as the scenery is simply wonderful; and grizzly bears have been shot from the decks of the steamer while going up or down the river.

At Telegraph Creek you will find everything you require in the line of guides, outfit and general equipment at very reasonable prices. The Hylan Estate makes a specialty of this business, and I have always heard that they were strictly on the level.

As to game: Moose, bear, caribou and timber-wolf are to be had almost at the edge of the settlement, while in the hills the goat and big horn are actually numerous, so much so that a man has to be a phenomenally rotten shot if he does not make his bag.

There is a Government agent at this point and also a telegraph office; and I know of no place that has more to offer the *bona-fide* big-game hunter.

There is also good hunting in the vicinity of Quesnel and Lilloet, reached from Ashcroft, B. C., by the Pacific Great Eastern Ry. Here the game is much the same as in the Stikine country; but while it is more easy of access it is not in the same class when abundance of game is a consideration.

### Source of King Solomon's Wealth

COULD it have been Rhodesia?

*Question:*—I note from *Adventure* that you are an authority on that part of Africa which includes Rhodesia.

Some time ago I read a volume entitled "The Ancient Ruins of Rhodesia" by R. N. Hall and W. G. Neal, published in 1905. I gathered from that volume that the writers were not archeologists, but that they had compiled the notes of their explorations for the use of scientists, who might examine these places afterward.

1. Can you tell me of any publications which deal with these same ruins?

I am interested in this matter in a purely amateurish way and have no desire to go to Rhodesia and explore for myself, nor would it be possible for me to do so, even if I wished.

2. Mention is made in this book of an ancient roadway called "King Solomon's Road" which was discovered by Baden-Powell during a raid which he conducted toward the Tuli River. Has this road ever been explored from beginning to end?

3. In a recent story in *Adventure* you mention the fact that the assumption that the Zimbabwe ruins were the source of the ancient gold supply has now been exploded.

Will you please refer me to the publications if there are any which cover that point? I will greatly appreciate your courtesy in this matter."—SHELDON F. POTTER, Philadelphia.

*Answer*, by Mr. Beadle:—In reply to your queries:

1. "Medieval Rhodesia" (Randall-MacIver, 1906); "Ruined Cities of Mashonaland" (Bent, 1892); R. N. Hall's "Great Zimbabwe."

2. Don't know of this road, but suspect name was given through influence of Haggard's "King Solomon's Mines," the Zimbabwe ruins being, I believe, the source of inspiration.

3. My assumption in "The Land of Ophir" was based on the opinion of Randall-MacIver, but I believe that since Hall has attempted to confute this.

You will find information under "Zimbabwe" in the Encyclopedia Britannica. Personally I think that MacIver's probably right—although I'm no archeologist—because of the fact that there does not seem ever to have been enough alluvial gold—and they couldn't well have mined in those days at that distance—to have supplied Solomon's wealth unless possibly his riches were greatly exaggerated.

### Wintering in the Adirondacks

WITH any kind of luck the trap-line ought to pay expenses, at least in large part, Mr. Spears thinks:

*Question:*—"I am about to enter upon an outdoor adventure, and I think you can advise me upon several questions as to its feasibility that are bothering me.

Perhaps if I go a bit into the reasons of the origin of the project it will give you better data on which you can base advice. A dose of regular tropical malaria contracted two years ago while I was wireless operator on a ship in transit through the Panama Canal seems to have left me in rather poor physical condition, even though apparently I have rid the germs from my blood.

Thinking ever since toward getting back my old keenness, the idea has for some time been growing on me that the best way of thoroughly and permanently overcoming my stagnant state will be to get out into the great, cold open in a strenuous, elemental life. Now the time when I am able to make the break approaches, and with a friend I am planning to spend this Winter in the southern Adirondacks.

Here are a few questions on which I would like to hear opinion from an informed person:

Do you think it possible for two entire novices to make financial ends meet during their first Winter in this country, depending altogether on income from trapping and hunting? After purchasing our gear, including traps, etc., we have left between the two of us only $75.

Do you think it possible, providing we have guts, for us to live through the extremes of mid-Winter there in a tent?

Can you recommend the best books on subjects

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of trapping and hunting which will most quickly facilitate our breaking in our hands?"—DOUGLAS A. MARSLAND, Tannersville, N. Y.

*Answer*, by Mr. Spears:—You are in a good country around Piseco. Your best trapping hold in those parts will be fisher (pekan) mink, muskrats, marten. With fisher bringing $100 to $35 each you have only to catch two or three to fill out your Winter, and I suggest you go right after them—other things as you have a chance.

Get Piseco quadrangle map (U. S. Geological Survey, Washington, D. C., 10c *silver*) and trap northwest of the lake. Find tracks of fisher, and then build cubbies—three-sided and covered trap dens. Put trap in entrance, and bait with chunk of porcupine, red squirrel, etc. Put traps right by the fisher tracks. Fisher make runway rounds in about 14 days, around and around in same circle. They travel along rocky side hills, across valleys, etc.

"Science of Trapping," "Mink Trapping," printed by A. R. Harding, Columbus, Ohio, good.

"Steel Traps," same publisher, is good. All-around trapping book, "Gibson's Camp Life and Tricks of Trapping," Harper & Brothers, Franklin Sq., New York. Send Triumph Trap Co., Oneida, N. Y., 25c for their trapping book, price-lists, and coil spring trap descriptions.

You can get through with your tent, covered by bough screen. But you'll need a cross-cut saw; get a second-hand one somewhere around Piseco. Cut plenty of dead and down timber.

I spent a Winter, one time, in the Adirondacks—ten weeks—and you'll find it great to live so. Go after big white rabbits for meat and seasoning. You can live on them. Bacon, flour, cornmeal, big can of Crisco (flavor with bacon-grease) for flapjacks, and baking-powder. Salt, etc.

Remember legs of a porcupine are good eating, too. Red squirrels, too—.22 rifle best meat-getter. Have lots of heavy woolen socks—thick, six pairs—and yarn to darn them.

I think that the $75 will get you through. Carry 25-cent compass. With the maps you can get to open lean-to camp on Metcalf Lake, west end, south side. Camp, also, Big Rock Lake (see map). Logs, east side on point. Camps on several lakes northwest of Piseco; ask about these at Piseco. Run lines of traps into that rough mountain country—bad country, but good trapping, I'm told.

If I can help further, come again. Lots of foxes there, which you can get with strychnin baits perhaps.

# LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

MACDONALD, JIM. Write. Your wife and "wee David" need you.—Address NELL, care of *Adventure.*

PAFFORD, WILLIAM J. Of Portsmouth, England Age about 22 years. Last heard of in Riordan's Lumber Camps, Quebec, Canada. Rumored to have been killed in Mexico City, but still believed to be living and working in the Mercantile Marine. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address W. LINFORD, care of *Adventure.*

MILLER, GEORGE E. or ALBERT. Brothers. The former is a printer by trade, but may be going to sea. The latter was last heard of as fourth officer on the Pacific Mail steamer *West Kasson.* Were shipmates of mine on the China station. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. B. PENTZ, P. O. Box 55, Anacortes, Wash.

SCHAFER, THELMA and MARY. Age about 18 and 20 years. They went west with their father about 14 years ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address LINTON STEPHENS, U. S. Veterans Hospital No. 60, Oteen, N. C.

TED G. Do please write or wire us. We miss you and cannot do without you. Everything will be forgiven and nothing will ever be mentioned. Mother very ill and needs you. Relieve our great anxiety and distress by letting us hear from you. We will help you get home.—Address NETTIE, care of *Adventure.*

MORTON, WILLIAM H. Artist. Age 58. Son of Rev. J. H. Morton. Ruth is dead. Please write, giving your address.—Address ARTHUR, P. O. Box 456, Yuma, Arizona, or Sheffield.

ABEL, FRED. Left Yerington, Nevada, for San Francisco, Calif., in 1912. Last heard from in San Francisco. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address HENRY ABEL, Box 386, Tracy, Calif.

WILLIAMS, GEORGE BERT. Last heard of in Texas. Ex-service man. Any information will be appreciated.—Address G. E. WILLIAMS, 2700 Diamond St., San Francisco, Calif.

WOOD, THEODORE. Your old friend would like to hear from you. Please write.—Address WALTER SCHLUTER, 315 Summit Ave., West Hoboken, N. J.

CONWAY, CHARLES LEROY. Last heard of in Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1920. Age about 31 years, five feet eight inches tall. Important information if you write.—Address L. H. LANCE, 1204 17th St., San Diego, Calif.

MCNAMEE, JOSEPH T. In Marine Corps. Sailed to France on *Van Steuben* in 1918. Please write.—Address JAMES J. MCNAMEE, 6132 Kingsessing Ave., Phila., Pa.

GORTON, ROMA S. Please come at once. Mother is seriously ill.—Address 305 S. Emporia, Wichita, Kansas.

DONOHUE, BILL. Old pal if you think we can be friends again, please write to me for I am lonesome. There is a good chance for you here. I will be contented to know you are happy. I will tell you something to your advantage when you write.—Address HARRY MURPHY, General delivery, Bisbee, Arizona.

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PURDOM, CHARLES EDWARD. Born in Paducah, Kentucky. Last heard from was in Lexington, Ky., in the Summer of 1920. Age about 17 years, freckle face, red hair, tall and slender. An old friend would like to hear from him. "Wemmeie Cian." Please write.—Address WILLIAM L. BEAN, care of *Adventure*.

DRIVER, LILY MAY. Left Eureka Springs, Arkansas, after mother's death in 1896, to go to relatives in Evansville, Ind. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ROBT. W. WILLIAMS, 553 18th St., Oakland, Calif.

ALIBI JOHN, or any member of the Spruce Division that worked with me on the bridges either in Oregon or Washington with 85 Sqd., 104 Sqd., 42 Sqd. Write.—Address ROBT. W. WILLIAMS, 533 18th St., Oakland, Calif.

WILLIAMS, REGINALD BOBBITT. Born near Gadsden, Tenn. Lived with grandfather named Dickens, a harness-maker at Eureka Springs, Arkansas, until the death of Mr. Dickens about 1897. Married and supposed to have lived in Little Rock, Arkansas. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ROBT. W. WILLIAMS, 553 18th St., Oakland, Calif.

SAAP, ERIK ALGOT. Lived in Bemidje, Michigan, in the year 1912. Supposed to be in Alberta or British Columbia, Canada. Father is dead. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address J. SAAF, 1536 Union St., Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

HUGHES, GEO. H. Your family is anxious to hear from you. Please write.

HICKEY, JAMES. Last heard of was residing with his father in New York City. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. MARY M. C. HAISS, 443 Schiller St., Elizabeth, N. J.

GRAHAM, EDNA MAY and WILLIE LEON. Last heard of at Grayville, Ill., in 1907. Any one knowing their address please write.—Address MRS. HARRY JACKSON, 1320 7th Ave., Seattle, Wash.

HOOVER, WILL and CARSON. Last heard of at Grayville, Ill., in 1900. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. HARRY JACKSON, 1320 7th Ave., Seattle, Wash.

## UNCLAIMED MAIL

CORPORAL; Farnsworth, Donald; Lange, Algot; La Sour, Fred W. Mrs.; May E. G.; Martin, Harry; Watson, J. C.

**THE following have been inquired for in either the Aug. 30 or Sept. 10 issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:**

ADDISON; Aurthor, B. S.; Barret, Albert; Brown, Wm.; Burton, Thomas, E.; Curtis, Jas. R.; Craft, Felix Werner; Dennehy, Timothy; Dubois, Joe; Farmer, Frank D.; Fisherman, Allen Gonlda; Foster, Lenora, Miss; Gaulyn; Goodson, Clarence Eugene; Harper, Chas. E.; Hoffman, Paul; Johnson, Jefferson Randolph; John R.; Kavanagh, Ned; Egan, E. E.; Keene, Tom; Marshall, Delia Arnold; Mesecar, Joseph Alfred; McFeat, Edward George; Myers, Mrs.; Olive, Private Dave W.; O'Rourke, Larry; O'Toole, John William; Outland, Merrit E.; Parent, Joe (Bully); Pugh, Sidney Richard; Sahlman, Toivo; Slavin, Jos. Patrick; Smigoski, John M.; Smith, Arthur James (Jim); Smith, James *alias* Nicholas Finley; Stengel, Michael R.; Steinke, Le Roy; Tarply, Thomas E.; Teague, Oscar R.; Turbush, Richard (Dick); Westhaver, P.; Williams, Patrick; Williams, Claude; Woodus, T. M.; Young, Derony.

MISCELLANEOUS:—"Rondo Seadogo Ahoy," "Pop" Polinkas, "Tex" Russell, "Dad" Hodge and any other of the *Rondo* crew, also shipmates of the tugboats *Penobscot*, *Nahant* or *Conestago* and mates of Co. F., 2nd Ala. Inf. Want to hear from any of the boys who served with Signal Corps in Mexico or at Columbus, New Mexico, during the Punitive Expedition during 1916 and 1917. Want to hear from any of the boys that served at March Field, Riverside, Calif., during the war.


# THE TRAIL AHEAD

## SEPTEMBER 30TH ISSUE

**Besides the two complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:**

**RED BLOOD AND WHITE** — ***Frederick R. Bechdolt***
An Indian massacre and a survivor who turned red.

**THE BEACH-COMBER** — ***W. Townend***
*Calden* was a dirty bum, but— Well, let *Mr. Harrington* tell it.

**ARMS AND THE BEETLE** — ***F. St. Mars***
Trials of a little red fighter.

**OVER THE RIM OF THE RIDGE** — **A Four-Part Story** — **Part II**
Might was often right in Nevada in the early days. — ***Hugh Pendexter***

**POINTED TEETH** — ***An Article*** — ***Santie Sabalala***
Cannibal practises in South Africa.

**TWO MEN—AND A BOAT** — ***J. Allan Dunn***
The man of brain and the man of brawn, and one has the strength to endure.

**THE GO-GITTER** — ***Stephen M. Walmsley***
An old-timer gets his gun.

**BY IMPERIAL POST** — ***George E. Holt***
The position of the stamp on a letter means a lot.

**TWINKLE-BRIGHT** — ***Bill Adams***
He began as stowaway and ended as mascot.


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# Red Blood and White

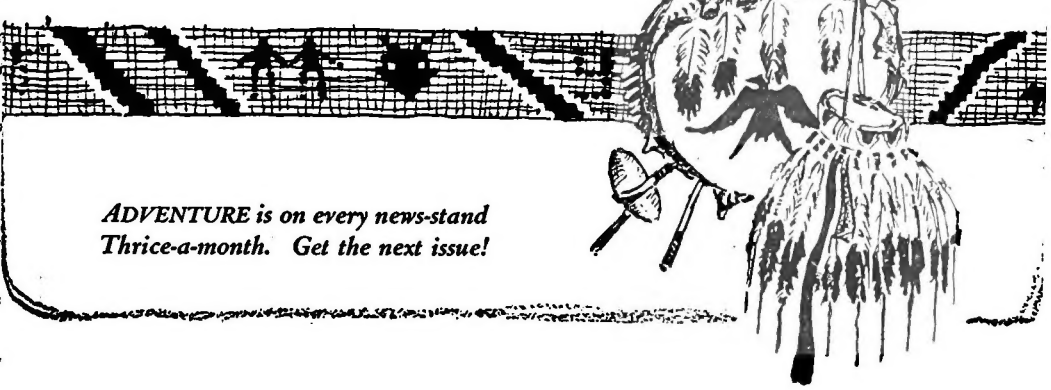
ALTHOUGH his mother was a white woman, Quanah, a lawless young chief of the Comanches, became the most relentless of Indian leaders of the southwestern nations in their warfare against the whites. The blood of his mother's people awakened no mercy in him. Did he change as he grew older? "Blood will tell," it is said. Did Quanah's white blood eventually tell?

You will enjoy reading "Red Blood and White" by F. R. Bechdolt, in the next issue of *Adventure*. It is an authentic account of the Comanche Indians, and is but one of the many high spots in

*September 30th*

**Adventure**

*Adventure is proud of its Service Department. If there is anything you would like to know about travel, or remote lands, just* ASK ADVENTURE.



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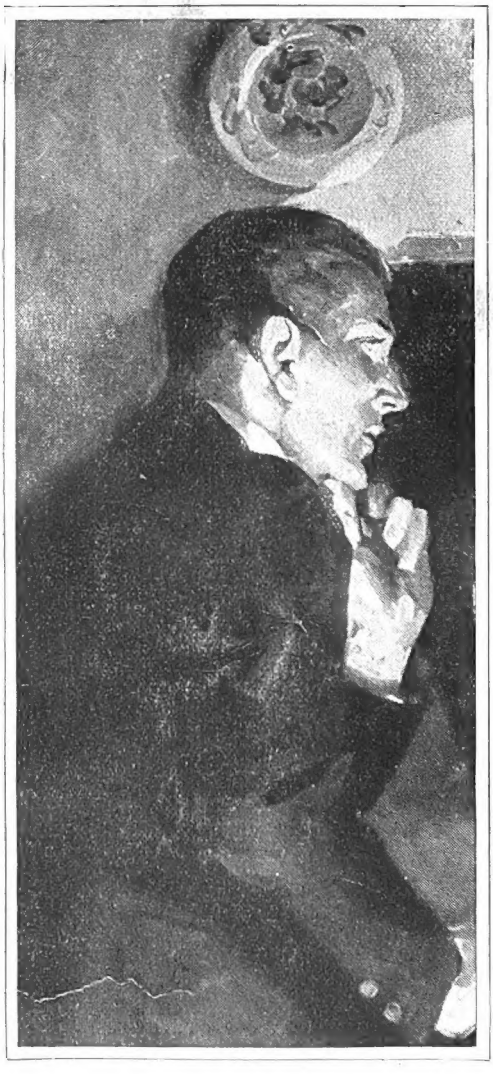

## "Give a Man Enough Rope . . ."

Will he hang himself? Henry Devereux, fighting a losing battle, decides to test this proverb. According to his Uncle's will, he will have to make $10,000 out of a run-down moving-picture theatre in a year to inherit the estate—and he has never earned a cent in his luxurious life!

Furthermore, the unscrupulous villain has joined the "Ethical Reform League" and has managed to put a ban on Sunday movies! Henry at last decides to give him plenty of rope—a hawser if necessary! Will he hang himself? Read this exciting story, "Rope," by the well-known author

***Holworthy Hall in September***

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